



The Crumbling State of Australia's Education System

The Western Capitalist Education system is not there to Educate. A system whose framework is built upon ownership of the means of production, the creation and existence of any institution within would inherently be for the fulfilment of that purpose. The ownership of the means of production resulted in Economic stagnation of capitalist economies. In order to improve economic growth Western governments embarked on privatisation of several institutions including education. This move was for the sole purpose of making profit out of Education. Concern for profit over real Education reduced the quality of Education for students and reduced interest in teaching for teachers.

Moreover, economic stagnation has had a major impact on schools and education and has resulted in government cuts to school budgets. Ever since the 1974-75 onset of economic stagnation, real economic growth has stopped which has put increased pressure on institutions in society such as Education. Annual school budgets have been so tight that institutions have had to raise tuition fees to compensate for their services. States across the board have steadily cut per student education funding. In the US for e.g. per student funding from years 2008-2014 remains 10% lower than what it was prior to the 2008 recession.

The Privatisation of Education has also resulted in sky high costs of Education. In 2015, Australian schools further increased fees by 4.9% averaging private school fees per student to \$22,280 annually. Increases to the already sky-rocketing costs of schooling means parents may have to look for other options. Some take on multiple jobs while others cut down on necessary home renovations or cut back on holidays. All these sacrifices affect not the Government but family life. Crucial family gatherings and bonding times are eliminated for endless hours of work as parents try to cover school costs. Parents become so entangled with work commitments that they do not have enough time to have a productive conversation with their children about schooling life or other issues they may be facing.

For school students privatisation has meant graduating with little interest in what they have been taught. Students study only for the sake of grades as that is all that is of value. For this reason, students struggle to remember much of what was taught in school especially with subjects/topics they hated studying in the first place. Students are not to blame as schools no longer educate but rather produce workers for the workforce. They equip the students with the necessary skills to produce obedient, diligent and law abiding workers who will accept hierarchy and authority.

Higher Education leads to a more educated and productive workforce. However, again sky high costs of University Education deters students from quality education due to affordability and creates inequality of opportunity especially for those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Government loan schemes such as HECS are accessible to a few whilst others such as international students fall short of eligibility. International students contribute a total of \$33,000 (Bachelor's degree) in university tuition fees annually to the Australian Government.

The taking up of loans may seem advantageous for tertiary education however majorly it is of disadvantage to most. For those eligible, taking up of loans can place immense pressure on students to perform well, which can lead to dropping out. On the other hand, those that get through do so with enormous debt on their backs. In order to get started on debt repayment immediately most try looking for highly paid jobs despite being under-qualified for the positions. Debt repayment takes years, even decades to complete and thus debtors remain under the thumb of creditors for most of their working life.

Widening the accessibility to education by lowering university fees has many advantages for students. First and foremost, education should be a fundamental right of all individuals to experience university and have access to the knowledge it affords. Costly university fees make it difficult and impossible for people from low-socio economic backgrounds to access education.

Secondly, there is a greater need for specialists in most fields of work, especially in fields of healthcare and medicine. It is a sad state of affairs for both the individual and society that one's financial capacity deprives them of their chances to shine through as potential employees, at times in specialist fields. Thirdly, being deprived of university education lowers one's employment prospects. It is a known fact that having a university degree is reflective of an individual's intellectual and professional quality and this status attracts employers and recruiters.

Privatisation of Education has also resulted in serious social issues that affect our youth. Bullying is a significant and serious issue that can have long-lasting repercussions. Bullying has had a traumatizing impact on many children, some even taking their own lives. Statistics from a 2009 study of the prevalence of bullying amongst Australian school students aged between 8-14 showed that roughly one in four students experienced some form of bullying from elementary to secondary school (Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study). The fact that bullying is prevalent throughout the world, means that there is something inherently wrong with the system that governs the world. As citizens of a capitalist system that encourages dominance over others, it is not unlikely that individuals will try to dominate over others in whatever way possible. This is the reality of bullying and what motivates bullies to exercise power over their subjects. People try and dominate because that's all that they have ever seen or experienced from those in positions of power.

Drugs and alcohol abuse is another health crisis affecting our youth. A 2011 survey of American high school students by Centres for Disease Control noted that 39% of teenagers reported drinking alcohol within the duration of one month and 22% engaged in binge drinking. The statistics in Australia are no different with 37.3% of Australians aged 14 or more consuming alcohol on a weekly basis. The effects are life-threatening as Alcohol contributes to the 3 major causes of teen death: injury, homicide and suicide.

Cannabis and tobacco are the three most commonly used drugs among young people. According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey of Australians aged 12-17 years (2013) around one in six (14.8%) had tried cannabis and just under 3.7% smoked tobacco on a daily basis. The consequences on schooling are immense as they contribute to memory issues affecting grades and interest in school. It impacts relationships with both family and friends and may result in life long regret upon withdrawal.

The National Union of student's survey found that 25% of Australian university students reported unwanted sexual experience. One of the top ranking universities of Sydney, The University of Sydney alone received 17 formal complaints of rape, attempted rape and other indecent assaults involving students over the span of only five years.

These all are real social issues affecting the education sector. However, it is a sad reality that Western governments fail to implement programs to target these issues. Under capitalism, everything becomes an economic equation and when there is minimal economic gain there will be minimal solutions to solve the problems at hand.

Privatisation of Education has not only affect student interest in Education but has also diminished interest in teaching. Teachers have had enough as they are forced to work under immense pressure with lack of funding and adequate support. Beginning teachers are likely to exit the profession within five years, figures as high as 50% in the US, 40% in Britain and 25% in Australia. As experienced teachers leave the profession, schools are forced to resort to out of field and inexperienced teachers to teach curriculum areas such as Maths. Statistics show that only 45.6% of Australian IT teachers of grades 7-8 have completed a formal university IT degree or training in the area.

Kathy Margolis and Gabbie Stroud, two long-lasting teachers who quit the profession and took to social media to talk about the appalling state of the field of teaching. Kathy Margolis, a Brisbane based teacher with 30 years experience in teaching quit teaching saying "*Never have I experienced a time in my profession where teachers are this stressed and in real fear for the mental health of not only themselves, but the children that they teach.*" She argues that the joy

and creativity that once used to be in teaching is slowly being sucked out as teachers are forced to work under immense pressures of a data heavy system with minimal relief.

After 20 years of teaching in primary schools Gabbie Stroud resigned heart-broken by the state education. She says *“Education today is run on a business model”* and that working as part of a system that makes money out of schooling was ethically and morally wrong for her. She further argued that education should not be standardised as each child learns in their own time and in their own way. *“Education today is being driven by standards-standard curriculum, teachers performing to standards and standard testing.”*

Furthermore, an ever-changing education curriculum has confused and fatigued teachers. Changes in Curriculum come with a change in each administration. The problem is that every administration implements a program different to the prior one and teachers commit large amounts of time and effort in making them work before a new administration comes in and implements a new plan. Another issue is that reforms come from those with least contact with student populations that is the government as opposed to teachers themselves. The parameters of curriculum revision thus remain undefined and misunderstood and so the process suffers from confusion and failure for decades to come.

The impact of frequent curriculum change on the wellbeing of teachers is immense. Teachers experience feelings of dissatisfaction and incompetence as the recurrent changes make them fatigued. A continuous cycle of these feelings eventually results in confusion on how to tackle such frequent changes and eventual frustration upon having to put previous efforts to waste. Along with frequent curriculum change privatisation of education has seized the freedom of innovation in teaching as private schools have their own set rules and methods which teachers have to follow. This has further reduced job satisfaction and thus made it difficult for teachers to perform best they can.

Actual personal involvement in the revision of curriculum is extremely important and when such takes place it guarantees infrequent changes to curriculum. However, since the 1980's governments have given the excuse of mistrust in local districts and teachers to initiate and implement effective policy all for the purpose of the hidden agenda of making business out of Education.

Education should also be about achieving personal development and becoming empathic individuals. However, the education of capitalist societies does not bring about personal development rather it produces politically passive, compliant and uncritical citizens. After a standard 15+ years of education under intensively authoritarian conditions and facing punishment for any form of resistance, individuals become accepting of hierarchy and authority. Their thoughts become engrossed with class divisions in a bid to rise and dominate over their inferiors. They grow into appallingly ignorant and insensitive beings, lacking concern for the social injustices that their rich world comforts inflict on the rest of the world. For if education did impact personal development then we would look at the world differently after having studied history. We would question World War 1 and World War 2. We would question the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. We would question our respective Governments' treatment of refugees and we would certainly question Capitalism as an ideology.

So it is clear that education under Capitalism is not there to educate. It is there to accumulate wealth through the privatisation of education and it is there to reproduce politically uncritical citizens who are insensitive to the situation of others. If we want to give our youth the best education then we must work to change the society we are living in. We must work towards a society that does not make business out of Education and that its education produces politically aware nations, those concerned with making the world a better place for all. This change can only be achieved with the implementation of Islam and its Education system through the establishment of the Islamic Khilafah System.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Hafsa Zayd**

Reference List

Ahmet Latifoglu, 2016 "*I quit: why do so many young teachers abandon the profession?*" Available: 27 Jan 2016 <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/i-quit-why-do-so-many-young-teachers-abandon-the-profession-20160126-gmebbu.html>

Alys Gagnon, 2016 "*Most private school families are struggling to pay the fees. But why would you?*" Available: 18 Sep 2016 <http://www.mamamia.com.au/private-school-fees-public-education/>

Better Health Channel "*Drugs and Teenagers*" Last Updated: April 2015 Available: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyiving/drugs-teenagers>

Borker et al, 2015 "*Privatisation of Education: Advantages and Disadvantages*" Available: 12 Nov 2015 https://wikieducator.org/Privatization_of_Education:_Advantages_and_Disadvantages

Dilkes et al, 2014 "*The new Australian Curriculum, Teachers and Change Fatigue*" Available: 11 Nov 2014 <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2457&context=ajte>

Drug Info "*Facts and resources about Alcohol and Drugs*" Last Updated 30 Aug 2016 <http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/topics/quick-statistics>

Erica Loop, 2017 "*Social problems affecting Students & Schools*" <http://education.seattlepi.com/social-problems-affecting-students-schools-2169.html>

Independent education Union, 2016 "*Why teachers are leaving the profession they love*" Available: June 2016 <http://www.qieu.asn.au/news/archive/2016/june/why-teachers-are-leaving-the-profession-they-love>

International debate Education Association, 2012 "This house believes Education should be free" Available: 2 March 2012 <http://idebate.org/es/node/18213>

Judy A Johnson, 2001 "*Principles of effective change: Curriculum revision that works*" http://www2.education.uiowa.edu/archives/jrel/fall01/Johnson_0101.htm

Laura Tucker, 2015 "*How much does it cost to study in Australia*" Available: 24 Jun 2015 <https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/student-finance/how-much-does-it-cost-study-australia>

Lauren Florin & Tiffany Hall, 2011 "*Change Issues in Curriculum and Instruction/Reform Proposals*" Available: 4 March 2011 https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Change_Issues_in_Curriculum_and_Instruction/Reform_Proposals

Lucille Keen, 2016 "*Private school fee hike higher than inflation*" Available: 20 Jan 2016 <http://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/private-school-fee-hike-higher-than-inflation-20160119-gm8u0x>

Michael Leachman & Chris Mai, 2014 "*Most states funding schools less than before the Recession*" Available: 20 May 2014 <http://www.cbpp.org/research/most-states-funding-schools-less-than-before-the-recession>

Nina Funnell, 2016 "*Shocking sexual assault statistics revealed as more victims come forward to news.com.au*" Available: 6 July 2016 <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/shocking-sexual-assault-statistics-revealed-as-more-victims-come-forward-to-newscomau/news-story/7430ae1f269d97cc020fdc92b312abf9>

Pamela Medlan, 2012 "*Schools face more challenges than ever before*" Available 9 Oct 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-09/education-feature/4303856>

Rebecca Sullivan, 2016 "*Australia's on-campus sexual assault problem acutely affects international students*" Available: 14 Jun 2016 <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/australias-oncampus-sexual-assault-problem-acutely-affects-international-students/news-story/91ab4bfb83410df2c5a0fb7b5bc0f57>

Ted Trainer, 2012 "*'Education' under Consumer-Capitalism, and the Simpler way alternative*" <http://simplicityinstitute.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/04/TrainerEducationSimplicityInstitute.pdf>

Tejvan Pettinger, 2014 "*Should university Education be free?*" Available: 3 March 2014 <http://www.economicshelp.org/blog/949/economics/should-university-education-be-free/>