

Praxis: The Making of Australia's Radical Education Dossier

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Abstract

Radical Education Dossier is arguably the most successful independent continuous radical educational publication ever produced; made without financial support or institutional backing of any kind, surviving on the will and efforts of changing Editorial Collectives for more than 60 Issues over three decades, directly influencing at least two generations of readers, and establishing itself firmly in the field of education as a major player. This article charts the genesis of the Dossier and the manner in which it was introduced and produced.

Keywords: Radical Education Dossier, praxis, collective, production, magazine, editing, layout, distribution

The Context

Before seriously examining the context in which *Radical Education Dossier* (hereafter *RED*) was conceived and born, the reader has to imagine another world; one where technology was vastly different to the present. Imagine, then, a context in which there was no internet, no email, no Googling; no word processors let alone computers; no Pagemaker, a few typewriters but no printers in any house let alone every house: a context in which the Gestetner and Roneo machines ruled and photocopiers existed only in major offices and institutions; where there were no mobile phones or wireless connection of any sort, and where 'long-distance' phone calls were difficult to make and exorbitantly priced. Now place into that technological world a group of people largely without worldly means, holding tenuous jobs if employed at all, having little if any institutional credence, mostly living in share houses or squats, often devoid of even telephone contact, and, most importantly, who

knew nothing of the nuts-and-bolts mechanics of publishing or the infinitely more complex task of managing a major publication. Give those people a common cause – the establishment of a viable ongoing outlet that would give voice to the disenfranchised – but deny them any institutional or financial support; deny them their own permanent or even temporary office space; deny them any meaningful skills or experience in typing and layout; leave them originally with no access to networks of readers, bookshops, distribution points; and you have, roughly, the conditions under which *RED* was born. Add in the fact that these people had a tenuous hold on funds for the production of one Issue only, a hold which was hotly disputed by a far larger group which had an equally legitimate claim on the money, and the picture fleshes out: the whole enterprise is a hard, perhaps wild, ask; and initial failure will mean permanent suspension of the project.

The Genesis

Social movements rarely have a singular starting point; rather there tend to be a number of flashpoints, and from these there can grow a critical mass.

Australia did not have direct experience of the student riots of the late 1960s that swept through Europe and the Continent, Britain, the USA and Japan, although we were, of course, aware of them and many among us picked up on their significance and also became familiar with the circumstances, the literature and the causes that drove them. But we did have one common point of discontent with our overseas counterparts; that being the Vietnam war which brought people out into the streets in numbers never before seen in the country, and which also brought out people who had never before thought that taking to the streets was both legitimate in general and something they could do *themselves* in particular. And along with this common cause we also had something which was unique to us and our New Zealand neighbours: both our Governments brought to our shores *The Springboks*, the Rugby playing representatives of the rotting apartheid-driven South Africa of the time; and the *Springboks* brought on to the streets hundreds of thousands more people than they enticed to their games. Quite suddenly, and for the first time in a great many decades, there were people out protesting, engaging in overt civil disobedience – the word ‘riots’ was frequently and correctly used by the press – venting their hostility with government and authority, and openly clashing with the police. Not surprisingly, many who were protesting the Vietnam

war were also protesting the *Springbok* presence, and again not surprisingly many of those people found themselves together in yet another venue – Universities – at the very time of ‘The Dismissal’ when, in an unprecedented move, Australia’s first progressive non-conservative Federal Government since 1949 (the only Labor Government most had ever known and twice elected democratically by the people) had been summarily removed from power in November 1975 single-handedly by the Queen of England’s representative.

It was a time of anger and unsettledness and, in what may have appeared to be a quite sudden ‘moment’, Universities themselves were becoming caught up in multiple ferments which then spread internally through many of the Faculties. The ones I knew of through direct experience were Politics, Philosophy, Economics and Education at Sydney University; once quiet dreary enclaves which were now becoming sites of serious student dissent. One single moment summed up the entire encompassing atmosphere, when students ‘took over’ and occupied the highest position and symbol of authority in the University: the Vice-Chancellor’s office.

Students, and some staff, wanted change, and now demanded it. Philosophy, unable to accommodate its conflicting interests, split into two separate Schools. Economics stood more steadfastly in a theoretical rut, refusing to consider let alone embrace growing new ideas of political economy. And Education, where I was stationed, sat decaying comfortably in a conservative past, continuing, as if in reverence to Matthew Arnold, to push the idea that schools existed to transmit ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’ in order to gentle the masses and reward the most meritorious and deserving of pupils with the best and most highly paid positions in society: blissfully ignoring the growing literature to the contrary that was beginning to flow into the country. Students, however, were not so dismissive of that literature, mainly a set of *Penguin Education Specials* in the early 1970s, and very quickly picked up on the work of those such as Paul Goodman, Postman and Weingartner, Ivan Illich, John Holt, Herbert Kohl, Trevor Pateman, Jonathan Kozol, and particularly Paulo Freire – only to find that discussion of this work was either absent or cursorily dismissed from their classrooms. It was even the case that at Sydney Teachers College students were formally forbidden to read these authors and were ‘counselled’ if they were found in possession of such works.

And Education, unsurprisingly, was in a publication rut at the same time. There were few Journals, all subscription based and institutionally supported, with print runs in the low hundreds, but none of them was receptive to the 'new' thinking that was exciting the students and some of the younger and/or more 'open' academics; and none, of course, was publishing anything other than mainstream conservative and meritocratic rhetoric. In this context a number of us saw the need for an alternative venue where we, the students and teachers, also had some voice in the educational debate, and even some form or part of control of the material, such that we could bypass the institutions (e.g. *The Australian Council For Educational Research*) which stood at the portals barring our entrance and enforcing our silence. We knew of models based in England that we might follow – *Radical Philosophy*, *Radical Education*, *Teaching London's Kids* – but we had neither the means nor the specific spark to set the motion alight.

Interestingly, what was to light up in Education started as a glow in Economics where some people, being more aware than us of the emerging work of Sam Bowles and Herb Gintisⁱ, organised the *Political Economy Now!* Conference and brought these Harvard professors to Sydney in June 1976. And now it all started to come together very quickly. Many of the Economics students were also Education students, and there were those among both groups who had worked together on 'Vietnam marches', anti-Springbok protests and 'Dismissal rallies'. Ideas and excitement bubbled in the share-houses preferred by this student community, whose 'suburb of choice' was Glebe, which sat on the northern boundary of Sydney University but was also in the direct path of, and was thus a living obstacle to the New South Wales State Government's project of bulldozing a historic part of Sydney out of the way of a newly proposed motorway. There was tangible angst and protest in the air. As we physically blocked the progress of the motorway we were also ready for a more specific 'fight', and as it turned out *Political Economy Now!* was to be the first Round. Round 2 came about when the 'Education people' piggy-backed on the coming of Bowles and Gintis and organised the *What to do About Schools* Conference; and the phenomenal interest in that Conference, which filled a Hall of 700 and turned away almost as many because of fire regulations, brought on Round 3: the formation of the *Radical Education Group* (hereafter their preferred name, *RED G*) charged with continuing the work begun at the Conference and also responsibly handling the enormous (as we saw it) surplus money donors had provided for us to organise the Conference in the first place. We had \$4000 left over, no way of

determining who to give it back to, and technically it belonged to nobody in particular as it sat in a Conference-designated bank account and the Conference was over and paid for.

The short version of two months of heated if friendly meetings of a cohesive yet fluid group was that the excess money should be used to produce *our* Education Journal. Not all of *RED G* agreed with this; of the supporters not all had the time or desire to engage in the work; and thus the production of what was to become *Radical Education Dossier*, No.1, October 1976, fell to an Editorial Collective of six: Clift Barnard, George Barnes, Bob Mackie, Leslie Redmond, Jim Walker and myself.ⁱⁱ We had the \$4000, a self-imposed impossibly tight deadline because we had to spend the money before *RED G* thought to take it back and before the summer holidays dispersed the group for three months, but not a clue about publication. Carol O'Donnell offered her house as a working venue, Therese Kenyon Mackie and Heather Saville joined in and began a long association with the production team, and when we held our first meeting (I have no idea how we arranged it because two of us had no phones and not many of us had cars), we did not even have a name for our product. That matter is worthy of a slight detour.

We did have one very obvious name, in our minds at least: *Radical Education*. The problem, however, was that, as previously mentioned, a publication of that name existed in England, and as a matter of courtesy we agreed to seek their permission to use this name for our Australian version. Given that I was about to leave for a Conference in England, the job fell to me, and when I arrived in London I contacted the collective that was running *Radical Education* at the time and we set up a meeting. But the encounter and outcome were hardly comradely, as I was informed that they had gone to a lot of trouble to establish their production and that they did not want it imitated or 'brought down' by what was anticipated by some of them to be a pale ambitious Australian imitation. Worse; they threatened in very clear terms that they would take legal action against us if we used their name even in the form of '*Radical Education: Australia*' which they considered would be enough to suggest we were an affiliate of theirsⁱⁱⁱ. This was the first, but by no means the last time we were threatened with legal action, and the ongoing threat was to influence a number of our central decisions and developments. But first; back to the name.

Not surprisingly, our collective was stunned by my news, and we spent a lot of time tossing round possible alternative names before Jim Walker cut the Gordian Knot with the simple

realisation that we represented *RED G*, we were after all 'red' as in 'left-wing socialists', that 'R E' could stand in for 'Radical Education' and all we needed was the right word that started with 'D'. Out of an extremely short list of possible contenders 'Dossier' was chosen. We had a name; it was now down to work.

Although time was extremely short, content had to wait, and the first meetings of the Collective, which were many and frequent, dealt almost entirely with setting up the ground rules for the production.

Our purpose was very clear and straight-forward, and of all its articulations I think the best and clearest is to be found in *RED1*'s 'Editorial':

At a time when there is an attack on education, and social welfare generally – led by a profoundly anti-democratic Australian government – there is an urgent need to build a strong radical movement in education, as part of a broad social and political movement for a more equal and democratic society.

We hope this magazine will make a contribution to that movement, by promoting a wider understanding of socialist analysis of schooling in Australia, a critical awareness of issues in schools as they are experienced by students, teachers, parents and others, and the development of strategies for radical change.

In the following Issues a shorter statement was appearing on the inside back cover:

Radical Education Dossier examines the conflicts within schooling and education. It identifies the opposing interests involved in the struggle and works to develop strategies and tactics for change.

Our long term aim is to work towards further development of a socialist theory of education. Our immediate aim is to analyse the current process of education and to examine and explore the role of education in society.

This attempt to 'promote' and 'develop' a 'socialist analysis of schooling' and 'a socialist theory of education' was hardly bomb-throwing barricade-storming stuff, but it was different enough from what was otherwise being promoted and developed to bring about fear and resistance from virtually all parts of the educational and political 'establishment'^{iv}, which in turn added to our motivation. We were openly and proudly socialists; we had our *raison d'être*; now it was down to the nuts and bolts of doing the thing!

It was decided that we would eschew the trappings of a traditional Journal and even the use of such a name, and thus *RED* became a ‘Magazine’ in name and in format, to be published in three Issues annually, with the aim of reaching thousands of broad readers rather than the few hundred specialists that traditional Journals were directed at. It was to carry scholarly pieces but not be defined by them (we aimed generally for two substantial articles per Issue). Each Issue was to be both topic-centred and topical, dealing as far as possible with ‘what was bubbling at the moment’ with a clear and distinct socialist orientation. Thus *RED* focussed firmly on the politics of IQ testing when Hans Eysenck and Arthur Jensen visited our shores, and analysed the problem of youth unemployment when the Conservative Federal Government ‘explained it’ as ‘dole-bludging’ and blamed it on the preponderance of married women in the workforce; but we did not engage in debate such as whether or not there was an epistemological break in the works of Karl Marx, nor did we judge contributions on considerations such as whether they looked favourably on Trotskyism or not. The content was, of course, to be broadly socialist, but it was not to be narrowly doctrinal. The Collective’s ‘editorial’ work, therefore, was to be inclusive and open; and when the ‘red pen’ came out, literally in Clift Barnard’s hands, it was to excise the arcane and jargonistic and to maximise ‘inclusivity’ such that our articles, although rigorous, were jargon-free and accessible to the every-day reader. Content had to be not just topical but also diverse, from book reviews (Bob Mackie was an avid reader and a brilliant reviewer) to news items, announcements of upcoming events, directories of other left-oriented organisations and similar material. Further; it was not to be the Collective’s vehicle for publication^v – rather our job was to seek out material from the widest possible base and to especially encourage schoolteachers to write (sadly, we consistently underachieved in this specific regard, as did every future Editorial Collective). Possibly our biggest debate was over whether each number would carry a feature distinguished ‘non-topical’ article, but in the end we went for ‘topicality’, which worked in favour of the ‘relevance’ of the magazine but, as I shall indicate later, may have had something to do with its eventual demise.

These may seem to be fairly major decisions regarding policy direction, but they paled dramatically in the face of the largest decision we took: namely that being on the Editorial Collective and producing a number entailed doing *everything*. Our job, as we saw it, was not just to select (edit) the copy; it was also to type the copy (two-fingered – no giving it to a secretary), lay out the entire number, distribute the finished product and, not having (or wanting) a business manager, to handle the entire financial and practical logistics of

distributing and tracking 5000 copies around Australia, selling them, accounting for the proceeds, and preparing for the next Issue. The only tasks we left to anyone outside of the Collective were typesetting and printing the magazine.

Examination of the ongoing content of the *Dossier* can easily, and quite rewardingly, be undertaken by the reader simply by visiting the University of Technology Sydney Centre for Research in Learning & Change web-site: <http://www.rilc.uts.edu.au/archives/edlinks.html>^{vi} and/or (more superficially) by glancing at the back page of later Issues^{vii}. Perhaps not surprisingly, matters such as social justice, feminism, multiculturalism, peace education, employment (and unemployment), standards, school discipline, sexism, racism, and the very politics of schooling itself, were familiar and thoroughly examined themes; but I want instead to concentrate mainly on, and describe more fully, what was and is less known and visible, and I believe somewhat more important; namely exactly what was entailed in this exercise of *collective praxis*, by detailing the production and distribution process that we undertook.

Production

Production began with a call for copy, which was done by word of mouth or over the phone through *RED G* members, the NSW Teachers Federation, academic colleagues, and virtually any other means or avenue we could think of. (After the first Issue this became far easier as people actively sought us out with copy). The Collective then undertook the process of selecting and ordering the copy which would make up the first Issue, and as most of it was hand-written we typed it up as best we could. That was the easy part!

We then took the copy to our chosen typesetter, who in turn asked us questions we had no serious clue in answering: how many columns to a page? what font? how many points? Having absolutely no idea about columns or what fonts and points were, we looked at some examples and chose a column format, a nice font and what we hoped was a suitable point size. Then, later on hearing that the setting had arrived, we returned and picked up what turned out to be galleys. For the first time it physically hit us that these long galleys had to be turned into 32 *pages* of a magazine; and that *we* had to do it.

The collective ascertained, in part through consulting the teams that produced the various University Newspapers, that turning the galleys into a 32 page magazine was initially a matter of setting up mega-pages of a block of magazine pages in a particular order, and literally laying out our material exactly where we wanted it to appear on the printed page. So, armed with little more than scissors, sticky tape, glue, white-out and rulers, we set about doing just that. We tried laying out the first mega-page on the floor, but that proved impractical as we proceeded to ruin everything, including our backs, by walking across or tripping over the material or twisting ourselves into horribly contorted shapes. So we made an arrangement with the Student Union at Sydney University whereby they gave us access to the large dining tables after the dining room had closed up for the night. Problem solved. Large mega-sheets were laid out across the tables at workable height, and then we went to work looking at our copy, mentally fitting it into ruled blank magazine-size pages, and then, with each page worked out mentally, the cutting, pasting (and hoping) began. After many hours of trial, error, correction, re-pasting, re-trial and so on, the entire magazine lay before us, with pages out of order of course, to be corrected and placed properly during the printing and collating process.

But there was one major problem: thankfully one we had foreseen before the layout began. The area covered by the copy did not exactly match the space available: there were gaps and large areas of blank space – but we had come prepared.

The copy we gave to the typesetters had no headings or ‘shout blocks’. These were inserted on layout-night by the ingenious use of a child’s writing toy named ‘Letraset’ which was basically sets of stick-on letters of different sizes and fonts. So; after all the copy was in place we put in the headings and blocks by hand, letter by letter, using ‘Letraset’, and it worked a treat, or at least up until *RED3* and onwards when unsteady hands led to some less-than-even headings. Then many of the spaces were filled by sticking on cartoons from the bank of original and ‘recycled’ ones which we had brought with us. And in the places where it all got too hard we just left white space. *RED1* is a testament to this ingenuity. Take a look: it is all hand set using cut-and-paste and ‘Letraset’; and now that you know this look at the sneaky placing of the heading on page 12 and the white space on page 30 – just 3/4 of a column inch of white space in the entire Issue, and all this done by people whose combined experience in such matters totalled zero.

The mega-pages then went off to a professional printer, who duly delivered 5000 printed copies back to us. For all the debate about whether *RED* was a goer or not, through all the bumbling camaraderie of the production process, we had the first number in our hands inside four months from the *What to do About Schools* Conference. But the moment of sheer joy passed quickly as we realised that now our work was really to begin.

Distribution

The printers had to deliver 5000 copies of *RED1* somewhere, and *RED1* itself contained a form inviting would-be subscribers to sign up and forward cheques for future Issues. We therefore needed a physical address, and Bob Mackie was kind enough to give up rooms in his home to piles of *REDs* and have his mailbox stuffed daily with correspondence. Thus 10 Reuss St Glebe became *RED*'s first home (were it in London might it possibly bear a blue plaque by now to mark the occasion?). Also, the typesetters and printers reasonably expected payment for their labour, and so a bank account had been set up at Glebe both to make payments and to receive money if and when it came rolling in. All we had to do now was sell the entire 5000 copies at 80c each (it was a condition of establishment that we were to function in a not-for-profit manner) to recoup the \$4000 expenses paid out for typesetting and printing. We had an address, a bank account, two rooms full of *RED1s*, *RED2* promised for the following April, and a bank balance of zero. Distribution was obviously very important. But how does an Editorial Collective with no secretary, no office or office equipment, no subscription list, no money for postage, no institutional backing or support, and absolutely no experience, distribute 5000 copies of a new magazine across a vast country like Australia and keep tabs on their whereabouts and account for the incoming financial returns? Obviously, with great difficulty: but we not only did it; we 'sold out' and had to print another 3000 copies.

We started close to home. As *RED* hailed itself as the 'Magazine of *REDG*' on the front cover, and declared on the inside of that cover that it was produced 'on behalf of *RED G*', we 'unveiled' *RED1* at the earliest *RED G* meeting. Members duly bought their personal copies and a large number bought multiple copies confident of being able to on-sell them to their friends and acquaintances. Others just took multiple copies with the promise of converting them to cash-flow, a promise they came good on in the main. Then we, that is the same old

Editorial Collective, got busy with pen and paper. We had the list of those who had registered for the *'What to do About Schools'* conference; we had lists of staff in Education, Philosophy, Politics, Economics and other Faculties in Australian Universities and Teachers Colleges; we had lists of people in broadly left-wing associations, Teachers Unions, Student Representative Councils and all manner of 'friendly' organisations; and thanks to the surreptitious late-night use of a number of University Departments' Gestetners and Roneo machines (state of the art for those days), thousands of letters were printed, and away they went by hand or in the post, some paid for by ourselves, some filtered a few at a time through University mailing systems. Supportive university staff talked about *RED* in class, put it on reading lists and even sold (or gave) copies to their students. Students were particularly taken with *RED* given its difference from other Journals, its relevance to them and its affordability. Within a month we were well known, and *RED* was selling around the country.

At this point we set up what might be called a distribution network. We managed to find at least one person in each University or College in the country, and a person in most Unions, who was willing to take a bundle of copies and be the local 'representative' for the magazine. This spread exposure and sales, and cheques flowed regularly into Bob Mackie's mailbox and Bob made increasingly regular trips to the bank while I kept tabs as best I could on where the magazine was selling and where the unsold copies lay. We then took it to libraries, and within months a large number of academic libraries, including some outside of Australia, were subscribers. We also hawked it to commercial bookshops, which boosted our exposure but at a cost, since bookshops worked on a 'sale or return' basis and took 1/3 of the price as commission whereas we were selling at cost: but there was a time when the public could buy *RED* at many of Australia's leading bookshops, as well as in bookshops in London, Brighton, Birmingham and Cambridge. A further 'sales-point' was the obligatory table at major Conferences, especially the NSW Teachers Federation Annual Conference (at times it took some arm-twisting but there was always an Editorial Collective member ready and available to sit at a table throughout a Conference); and as a final resort we used the 'read now, pay later ... maybe' method of just leaving small bundles in student cafeteria and staff meeting rooms with notes attached suggesting to the effect that if you liked this you could send 80c to the address mentioned, and if you liked it even more you could subscribe to future Issues. *RED1* came out in October; by Xmas we were in a sound financial position to both pay for a printing of a further 3000 copies of *RED1* and to guarantee the typesetters and printers that we could pay for *RED2*.

Shifting Sands

Of course all did not go well all of the time. Some members of *RED G* who had opposed the magazine from the beginning accused us of 'taking over', making the rest of *RED G* irrelevant, and demanded the money back, declaring *RED1* to have been a successful experiment but not to be continued with (the fact that we had hundreds of pre-paid subscribers did not seem to enter their consideration). A personal issue also erupted within *RED G* resulting in one member threatening to sue the group; a particular academic somehow felt sufficiently libelled by material in *RED* to also threaten legal action; and we had to 'pull' what was probably our best article from *RED4* to avoid a law suit because, in critiquing the validity of a particular IQ test, we disclosed certain items in that test and were firmly told that we were in breach of copyright. The money, absolutely irreplaceable, was in danger, and so too was our physical address given that Bob Mackie was about to be on the move. So to safeguard the magazine as best we could, we incorporated *RED*. A \$2 company, *Radical Education Publications* was formed where the finances lay safely 'in trust', and our address was moved to a PO Box. In just two years and over seven Issues, *RED* had transmogrified from being 'the Magazine of *RED G*' to a product of *Radical Education Publications*, PO Box 197 Glebe. By *RED7* (October 1978, and with a largely different Editorial Collective) there was no mention of *RED G* on the outside or inside cover, and in fact there was no *RED G*. Some felt that we had taken 'a bourgeois move too far', while others delighted in our appropriation of bourgeois methodology to save a socialist enterprise. But the important thing was that the magazine had been made safe: it was alive and well and, notwithstanding one disastrous over-estimation of our self-worth resulting in the printing of 8000 *RED2s* that we realistically had no hope of shifting, we settled on, and for the first few years were working comfortably with a run of 3000 per Issue.

In fact *RED* was more than alive: it was kicking, and it kicked on for more than sixty Issues over three decades. Over that time it shifted focus on many occasions, as an organic magazine would be expected to, and members of the Editorial Collective came and went and different emphases came and went with them. But times changed too. Following our example (I suspect) the economists began producing the *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, colleagues in New Zealand started *Access* (which is still going albeit now with institutional support), and the larger and more ambitious *Social Alternatives* was launched (it,

too, is still in production with the backing and support of two Universities), all filching some of our readers and contributors. Still within the publishing arena, the bourgeois press and then more importantly the traditional journals reacted to the fact that our magazine and its articles were being far more widely read than theirs, and so began publishing the sort of material that *RED* was established to give voice to, as well as recognising and publishing the authors who were contributing to and/or producing *RED*. On the broader front, a newly-elected New South Wales State Labor government abandoned the proposed motorway mentioned earlier; a decision which subsequently played its part in the squats and share houses disbanding and the Glebe student community dissipating as the area became safely gentrified. The Federal Conservative Government that came in with the ‘Dismissal’ of 1975 was in turn replaced by Labor in early 1983, lessening the targets available for a magazine like *RED*. And on the broader political front, socialism began losing its appeal as people confused the break-up and downfall of the Soviet Union, and particularly the fall of the Berlin wall, with the mistaken belief that the days and relevance of Marxism and socialist ideals were passé. The Communist Party of Australia ceased publication of its newspaper, *The Tribune*, and then itself quietly disbanded in 1991 and left the political stage^{viii}. And yet all through of this *RED* kept kicking and adapting, gradually moving into what its new Editorial Collectives referred to as a ‘warm current’. After eight years it undertook a name-change to *Education Links*, subtitled *The Radical Education Dossier*, and a change of situation away from ‘*Radical Education Publications*’. At around the same time it ceased openly promoting a ‘socialist revolution’ (which, ironically, was not part of the original stated aims: see above) and trumpeted instead the idea of a ‘broad political movement towards socialism’, which was also finally dispensed with although not until thirteen years later. Content changed to reflect not only the ‘new times’ but also a growing emphasis within the Editorial Collectives to eschew ‘rational objective Marxist analysis’ and become less ‘theoretic’. Reading groups morphed into something approaching the ‘encounter groups’ of earlier times, and *RED* began to offer less of a rigorous reasoned socialist analysis and critique and moved more towards the ‘recognition of and respect for’ children’s interests which had made the ‘progressive education’ movement of the 1960s so enticing to many^{ix}. Put simply, and perhaps too crudely, *RED* was becoming less radical, and in the process progressively (pun intended) lost its distinctiveness and its hardness.^x It may be that, had we decided at the beginning to temper the immediacy and topicality of *RED* with a major feature article, it may have had more of a ‘centre’ to hold it together for longer.

RED was also experiencing the ironic paradox that while new technology was making production easier, subscribers and readers eventually began to dwindle somewhat seriously, given that, through no fault of anybody's, the original distribution network could never continue successfully in a country as wide and sparse as Australia. And yet, changing and diminished, it still kicked on, always without institutional support, and always driven by an Editorial Collective which at the very least continued to prove that through our labour people can produce what we want and need rather than passively consume what some 'establishment' wants us to do and have.^{xi}

But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, now in a world of home computers, desk-top publishing, articles distributed instantly as attachments to emails, blogs, zines, Googling to learn of Conferences or new books or anything really, and of course the growth of social media, there was little place left for something such as *RED*, and it finally bowed to the inevitable. There is no disgrace in that. This was not its moment; but *RED* remains testament to the knowledge that when a 'moment' comes, given the will and the heart, it can be seized.

As I write this (January 2014) there has recently been a massive 'moment' when Governments in the developed world have scrambled almost irrationally, and certainly unethically, in an attempt, as yet not totally successful, to contain a major crisis in capitalism; and there is a growing moment here in Australia in which right-wing political forces have gained the sort of control that can not only shift capital to the already-wealthy at the expense of social welfare and planetary ecological concerns, but in fact are already doing so at a frightening pace. It may no longer be *RED*'s job, but there is again important work to be done to counter this.

Postscript

In its early days *RED* was commonly seen as a danger and a threat by established academics, some of whom attempted to portray it as a momentary manifestation of the 'loony left'. The problem with this categorisation was not just that *RED* would not simply go away. Rather, in offering a forum for teachers, students and workers to speak out, *RED* gave voice to many who have since become Knights, Federal and State Politicians, Deans, Vice Chancellors,

professors, ecologists, recipients of various Commonwealth Orders, highly awarded journalists, famous film directors, Heads of Government Departments and Committees, and others including a Supreme Court Judge, who still continue to hold to the idea of social justice that informed the genesis of *Radical Education Dossier*

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Notes

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- ⁱ This was to crystallise in their famous book *Schooling in Capitalist America* (Basic Books, N.Y.: 1976), copies of which were flown to Australia immediately on publication and distributed to interested parties.
- ⁱⁱ I was a member of the Editorial Collective for five Issues (REDs 1,3,4,5 and 7) and stayed on to help with the organisation of distribution till the end of 1979. After that I was merely a subscriber and occasional contributor.
- ⁱⁱⁱ I believe, or at least have always hoped, that this was a spontaneous and ill-considered decision, made in the face of what seemed to be a threat; and that with more time for dialogue a more inclusive outcome would have resulted. We certainly harboured no ill feelings at our end, and we vigorously publicised their activities, as well as how to contact them and how to subscribe to their publication, in *RED* (see, for example, *RED1*, p.25).
- ^{iv} In 1977 I was a witness for the defence in a totally unrelated court case. The prosecution tried to discredit me by exposing that I was an editor of a revolutionary magazine, and their barrister wildly flourished a copy of *RED* while virtually screaming: 'Look, your Honour; it's red, red, red!' Unfortunately, for him, he was brandishing a copy of *RED4*, and his Honour replied: 'Really? It looks green, green, green to me.'

- ^v For example, Bob Mackie's book, *Literacy and Revolution: the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, London: Pluto Press, 1980, contains eight chapters, four of which were written by members of the initial *RED* Editorial Collective and a further two by *REDG* members. This material could easily have provided substantial copy in the form of ongoing 'featured content' if we were setting up a 'vanity press'
- ^{vi} This reference was most gratefully provided by an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this paper who also made a number of other helpful suggestions which have been incorporated into this version.
- ^{vii} *RED* was produced in the 'pre-electronic' era and, if not for the work of the University of Technology Sydney, would remain only in hard-to-obtain printed form. Although complete collections were held in many University and other libraries, a large number of these have sadly gone the way of so much printed material as library 'stacks' have been demolished and much that was not converted to digital form has been consigned to land-fill as part of economic rationalism and its associated 'progress'. Hard copies of *RED* should still be available in State Libraries and the National Library of Australia, as well as in private collections.
- ^{viii} A re-branded Party took the unused name in 1996, to very quiet political effect.
- ^{ix} This seemed to be a much broader phenomenon. At around this time I was in London and learnt of an upcoming Conference: 'The Politics of Teaching'. This being precisely my field, I contacted the organisers and sought to register and, if they wanted it, to give a paper. However, I was informed that the Conference was strictly for teachers only, there were to be no papers, and the whole idea was to let teachers talk freely about their classroom experiences.
- ^x It could be argued that at this stage *RED* had been unwittingly(?) more or less appropriated by the bourgeoisie and was no longer an anti-capitalist force serving the interests of socialism. I argued this position strongly while still trying to maintain a positive comradely approach to the magazine: see K. Harris, 'The Hard Cold Task Ahead', *Education Links (RED)* 52, 1996, pp.4-9.
- ^{xi} In 1997, for Issue 55 and beyond, the Collective was based at the Centre For Popular Education; University of Technology Sydney. This was as close as the magazine ever came to having an Institutional 'connection'