

# Pick your BATTLES

Despite never underestimating the attraction of a little S&M-based satire, Phil Beadle is concerned that the troops are being distracted by a war of words...

So it seems the Secretary of State for Education wants to take the Post-Threshold pay scale, the Excellent Teacher role and the Advanced Skills Teacher status, bung them in a pot, stir them up and name the seven or so teachers who pass a new test countrywide as... Master Teachers! Christine Blower, General Secretary of the NUT, has given this the hairdryer treatment, thinking the title somewhat anachronistic, "Given that the majority of the profession is female," she points out with, presumably, withering intent, "it would have been more appropriate for the government to have come up with a less gender-specific designation."

The inference here is that Christine wants to share the love, and to have two grades: Master Teacher and female counterpart; if this inference is correct and government are not open to Christine's challenge, then we have the potential absurdity of government

PHIL BEADLE IS AN EXPERIENCED TEACHER, AUTHOR, BROADCASTER, SPEAKER, AND JOURNALIST. (PHILBEADLE.COM)



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refusing to acknowledge gender equality issues on the basis that to do so would sound uncomfortably close to sounding sadomasochistic.

Which is surprising. In fact, given that education policy is run by a phalanx of poshos who want British education to replicate the many benefits they received from the hands of fags and masters (sometimes the same person) at their stately alma maters I'm amazed that Mr Gove isn't rushing sweatily to define a new nomenclature for a very special kind of instructor: Mistress Teacher! She will, of course, have to wear a special uniform, and will probably be extremely stern:

"Boy, where is your homework?"  
"I deliberately didn't do it, Mistress, so that you would punish me most severely."

Christine Blower makes – I suppose – a not entirely irrelevant point on challenging the introduction of the arcane, eighteenth century language of the public school into twenty-first century educational environments. And the NUT's press release strikes a satirical note: "The government's concept of the 'Master Teacher' seems in many ways to be reminiscent of a 'Goodbye Mr Chips' - style figure. Standards which require teachers to establish 'a stimulating culture of scholarship' seem to come from a nostalgia for a bygone age rather than reflect the vibrant and diverse classrooms of the 21st century."

The issue here is that the personal prejudices and dysfunctions of the current administration render themselves so easily the victim of lazy satire that it appears that even the NUT can't resist the temptation simply to point, laugh and take the piss. Sadly, as a response to a vigorously energetic and viciously ideologically driven administration on a drive to destroy the left's hold on education, and to cut costs in a brutal,

dehumanising manner, 'taking the piss' is about as impotent as giving it away. What the profession needs is a sense that union leadership is challenging government head on, in the trenches; with knives, swords and guns. We do not want them deconstructing linguistic nuance: that's the job of the newspaper/magazine columnist.

Any restructuring of pay grades is always (and transparently) just a means of cutting the wage bill. The government's intent is to put everyone who has been on a boosted salary because they have been assessed as having excellent abilities in the classroom back to square one of the main pay scale – the White Paper was entitled 'The Importance of Teaching'; some irony here, no?

This means that, for instance, an inner London Advanced Skills Teacher at the top of the pay scale could potentially be facing a salary cut of nigh on fifty percent, losing twenty eight grand a year. Families of dedicated teachers, who have been recognised as providing outstanding education to young people, and who have been used to living in homes they can afford, will be unable to get anywhere near the mortgage.

Perhaps, then, the biggest teachers' union in the country, when commenting on members being in a situation where they might lose their homes, should spend less time on the minutiae of equalities issues, and instead, fight for the those members' rights to make a decent living from doing a difficult and decent job. Altogether now, say, 'No, Master...'

