

Dervish Buttons

a rant by johnmichael rossi

SETTING:

A button factory, where people manufacture buttons. A feisty man in a fez becomes the cog in the system and begins to speak out of place. Others begin to chime in here and there. There is a fine line between the humans on stage and the machinery that their bodies are when put together- popping out buttons of all sorts.

"a school is not a place for community or political expression..." no buttons allowed. no slogans, no political thoughts, no expression.

Perhaps schools, should not be a place for expression- let's be the factories that we are little soldiers - spelling and grammar soldiers studying rules that have been long outdated, manipulated and maladjusted. little soldiers - little math machines counting our dwindling chances of survival in this quick-spinning globular society.

"A school is not a place for community or political expression"?

ironic that on election days, one of our most sacred days, we close down the schools so that these ancient factories can house the voting process. community banned; community denied, community oppressed

employees of the city whose whole combined mission and area of expertise is built around education - cultivating our youth into responsible, intelligent, innovative and worldly citizens - are being denied the opportunity to express their thought?

What are we afraid of? What are They afraid of? What might a button do? What might a t-shirt slogan do? What might a book do? An image? A lesson? Once we can be stripped of our buttons, the green light flashes on the stripping of our content, our profession, our identity, ourselves, our vision of what education is, which is the only thing that prevails and survives the overwhelming sea of bureaucracy that has infested and spread itself throughout the educational system- like an anonymous std; but we'll save sex ed for another poem, another play, another moment of self-expression.

Will our bubble of prosperity burst open?
 Our dream of happiness become
 a nightmare?
 Images of business men falling from
 buildings re-hash itself into my
 psyche
 this time of our own doing-
 we didn't yell loudly and clearly enough!
 we didn't wear our buttons!
 we didn't march in the streets!
 we didn't take risks!
 and say the words that have
 been bound
 up in our tired,
 overworked souls,
 "Something is rotten in the state of..."

Should we ban Hamlet for his accusatory words?
 Should I dig out my Michael Dukakis '88
 button, just to confuse people?
 Is agitation the way?
 Are we really talking about a button?
 Can I wear one of those little
 American flag pins that Mr. Obama was criticized
 for not wearing?
 Would that be patriotic? Or political?
 Would that perhaps perturb
 our immigrant population of students
 and parents, and teachers and staff,
 who may see the red, white and blue as a symbol
 of something we know not of.
 What about wearing the crucifix, the star of david or a
 Muska?
 Aren't religions political? Isn't religion a key player in
 our great wars?
 Should we talk about issues like terrorism in a
 different context? Should we explore such themes through
 allegory, metaphor, symbolism?
 Should we teach history from all perspectives?
 Or ignore its frighteningly cyclical nature?
 Should we teach literature as just words on a page
 and link them to some stale set of subjects with obscure
 relevance?

Why teach if not for the possibility of revealing truths,
 unearthing new ideas, discovering new ways... Why teach if
 these things become
 a danger?
 If I wear a button... What?! What
 happens?
 Our toilet-tissue wrapped tuckuses suddenly
 become soaked in...- What?! What happens?
 Our behinds aren't as safe as they were

before that pin pierced that lapel?
 Should we not talk about numbers
 or money, because students parents might work on Wall Street,
 or have stocks that fell, or just not have no money period?
 Might it be too upsetting? To speak of numbers?
 What, what, what are we protecting?
 Broken models?
 Dusty values?
 Confused Priorities? What what what, what
 happens if I
 if I share a piece of myself
 with my students? with my colleagues?
 Something as simple and pure as
 "I support _____ in the current
 election."

What are we talking about?
 What am I writing about?
 We go on and on in these circles.
 Neverending meetings.
 Endless new policy.
 Dancing around the point, without any attractive dance skills-
 Neverending this and that
 and what is accomplished?
 the election will come and go-
 and there will be even more necessary lessons to
 be taught and learned
 and wearing or not wearing a button
 all it really did was cause headaches,
 re-enforce the system's dysfunctionality
 remind us that every society and government
 en-acts a form of control and oppression
 in their own clever little way

No one is campaigning in the schools.
 Educators are just being who they are. They're making
 themselves feel slightly better during
 seemingly hopeless times- because
 they believe that
 someone in the world stands for
 something they believe in.
 Aren't their students in desperate need of attention?
 Aren't their budgets to fix? Facilities to manage?
 Schedules to make?
 Curriculum to create? Parents to build communities with?
 Books to read? Anecdotes to write? Questions to ask
 ourselves?
 Art is questioning.
 So yes, I have some questions
 on this matter.
 Please bare with me as i
 search for the words to
 express my confusion to my community as I search for the
 politically correct way to phrase these questions.

*Gods of Education, my muses, look down on me
and give me the strength to prevail;
accept my harsh tongue and my crooked pen;
for they are necessary in order to cut to the heart of the
matter.*