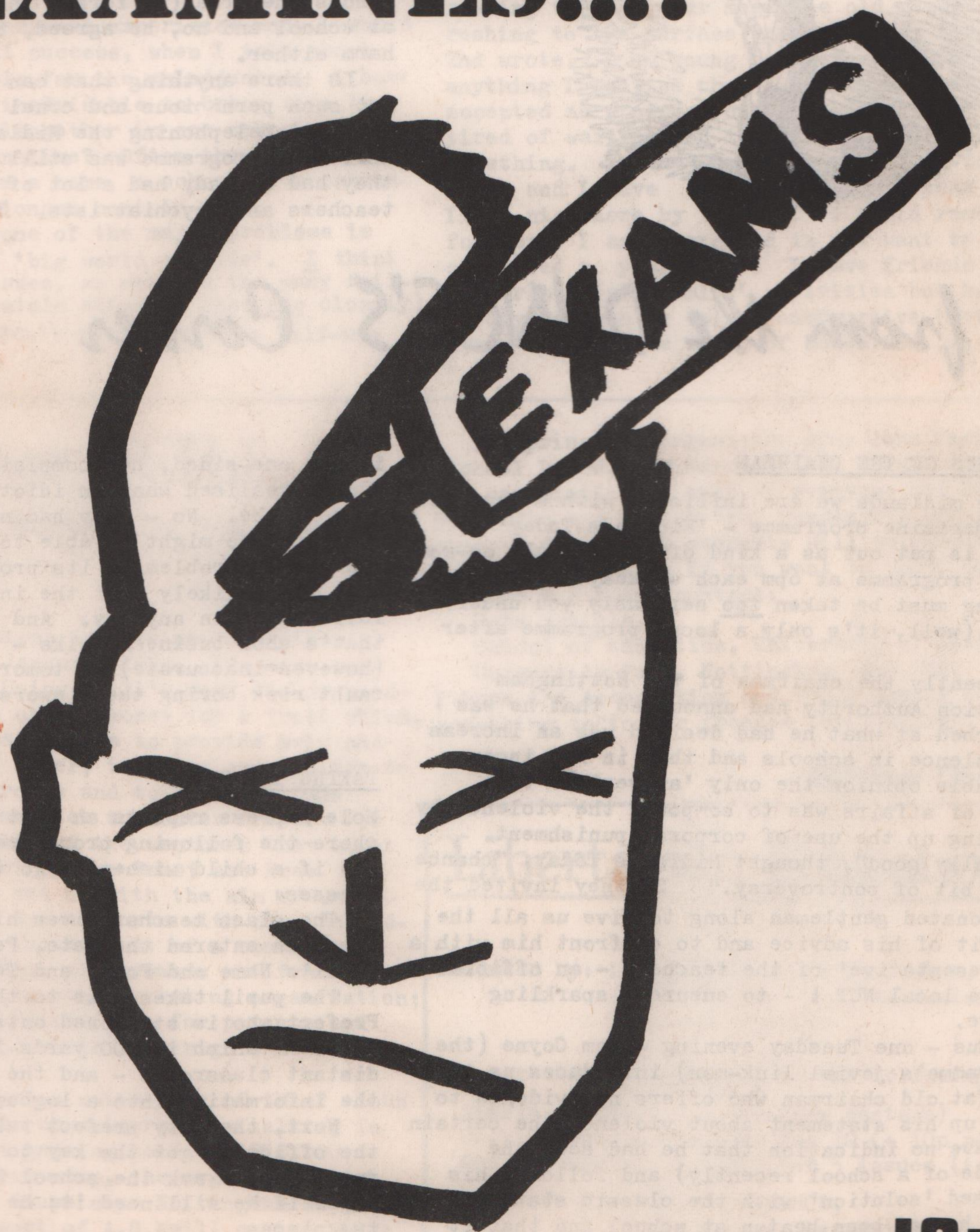


# LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION 14

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EXAMINES....







## from the DUNCE'S Corner

### THOUGHTS OF THE CHAIRMAN

In the midlands we are inflicted with a local TV news/magazine programme - 'Midlands Today' - which is put out as a kind of child/adult no-man-land programme at 6pm each weekday evening - nothing must be taken too seriously you understand (well, it's only a local programme after all).

Recently the chairman of the Nottingham Education Authority had announced that he was disturbed at what he had decided was an increase in violence in schools and that in his inconsiderable opinion the only 'answer' to this state of affairs was to compound the violence by stepping up the use of corporal punishment.

"Jolly good", thought Midlands Today, "chance for a bit of controversy." So they invited the opinionated gentleman along to give us all the benefit of his advice and to confront him with a 'representative' of the teachers - an official of the local NUT! - to ensure a sparkling debate.

Thus - one Tuesday evening - Tom Coyne (the programme's jovial link-man) introduces us to the fat old chairman who offers no evidence to back up his statement about violence (he certainly gave no indication that he had seen the inside of a school recently) and followed his proposed 'solution' with the classic statement that he had been beaten at school and that it had done him no harm. (Think again, Dear Sir, had it nothing to do with your subsequent development as a sadistic twit?).

So how did the 'representative' of the

teachers (employed, of course, by the worthy chairman's committee) answer this devastatingly original challenge? Well - he didn't - he agreed with everything his chairman said (shrewd thinking there, squire, you should go a long way) and actually went on to state that, in his opinion, "corporal punishment is an essential ingredient in a school". Essential mark you - no qualification - no regrets - n- compassion. (Could even be made compulsory, perhaps - say just after the compulsory morning assembly?).

Asked what he thought about the work and opinions of psychiatrists the chairman beams as he informs us that, "I don't call them psychiatrists, I call them trick cyclists." Such amazing wit - how can you compete with that? The teacher wisely doesn't even try - he lets the obscene remark pass without comment. And that was it - the programme ends with Tom Coyne smilingly recalling that he too had been beaten across the arse (we forget the euphemism used) at school and no, he agreed, it had done him no harm either.

Is there anything that can be done to counteract such pernicious and cruel nonsense? Some of us tried telephoning the Midlands Today office while the programme was still going out. Yes - they had already had a lot of complaints from teachers and psychiatrists. Yes - they agreed

it was one-sided, but complained that they hadn't realised what an idiot the NUT man would prove to be. No - they had no plans to contact somebody who might be able to challenge either the stated problem or its proposed solution. No - it was unlikely that the interview would be followed up in any way. And it wasn't - but that's show business folks - today's 'news' (however inaccurate) is tomorrow's 'old hat' - can't risk boring the viewers, old boy!●

### TAKING THE PISS

Mole Express reports an east Manchester school where the following procedure must be carried out if a child wishes to go to the toilet during classes:

The class teacher gives him a form on which has been entered the Date, Period, Time, Subject, Pupil's Name and Form, and Teacher's Name.

The pupil takes this to the Duty or Toilet Prefect who is stationed outside the school office - which is 400 yards from the more distant classrooms - and the prefect copies out the information into a logbook.

Next, the duty prefect takes the pupil into the office to get the key to the toilets. The pupil has to ask the school Secretary for toilet paper if he will need it; he will be issued with two pieces.

The pupil is then escorted to the toilet, which is unlocked for him and locked up again when he has finished. Finally he is escorted back to the main school●



# exams are the FAILURES: not the STUDENTS

Every student has felt the tensions of exams or assignment deadlines. Fear of failure hangs over students' heads for the whole year. University students enjoy some liberties over industrial or white collar workers, but they pay for this in anxiety. At the same time, the authoritarian control of work renders it so alienating that the result is an almost total apathy to the course or any other area of intellectual study, and an almost crippling inability to get any work done. This tension between the anxiety of failure and the inability to force oneself to do alienating intellectual tasks hangs over every student's life. Go into the refec. any time and you will see people traumatized and psychologically destroyed for any number of reasons - because they can't get up the willpower to go to lectures, because they have been working frantically to get an assignment in on time, because the deadline is coming and nothing has been done (not even a book read) etc. The average student's life follows a cycle of not studying (a full-time activity) followed by frenzied cramming. As more and more time goes by and more and more work is assiduously not done, the anxiety gets deeper and deeper until the sheer terror of failing (fear of the OUTSIDE WORLD with its even more alienating and unfulfilling jobs) strikes the student's heart, his resistance to work vanishes totally, and he performs amazing feats of stamina, concentration ingenuity, imagination, etc.

There are, of course, a few perverts who actually enjoy exams. These are people who have been made so terrifyingly "normal" after so many years in this education system that they have been dehumanized rather drastically. They no longer resist the work instinctively. They submit gladly to their oppression, relishing the competition and humiliation of exams. For those of us that exams make neurotics of, there is at least this comforting thought: we are still human enough to resist an insane situation. Our neuroses in the face of exams are in fact evidence of our sanity, evidence that we are still fighting. It is those who have given up, the cheerful masochists, whose sanity is in question.

These people, however, are only more acute examples of the general submissiveness. We all continue to allow ourselves to be forced through these periods of nightmarish tension, anxiety and even nausea. Most people continue to see the problem as adapting themselves to the situation, and getting some work done, rather than adapting a situation to fit their needs. Thus they are so geared to sublimating their tensions about exams rather than analysing the experience that they are unable to develop a critical awareness of the role of exams.

Exams are a weapon of social control. They are the ultimate threat in a system which controls what we learn, when we learn it, and tells us what the right answers are. They serve the same role as the power of hire-and-fire in industry. Those who don't meet the work

requirements are failed or fired. The rationale for this, of course, is that external assessment is necessary to maintain a certain objective level of knowledge. Obviously learning implies a continual process of assessing what we know and what problems require solving. Learning is the development of our awareness of the world and our relation to it. This development implies an independent critical awareness. The present system attempts to direct (rather than develop) a dependent, uncritical deference to the learning authority, the figure of knowledge. This is the perversion of the learning situation from learning about the world to learning about lecturers' expectations and playing games accordingly. The whole notion of external assessment expresses the very essence of authoritarian ideology - the average person is incapable of understanding his needs (what's good for him) or directing or controlling his own life. Thus, those who are fortunate enough to understand all this benevolently and disinterestedly assess the needs of these people and direct their lives for them. We are assessed externally for our whole lives. It is the failure to understand the essence of hierarchical power relations, of domination and submission which held back the left on this campus for years. They have been totally unable to generalise from their own powerlessness to the submissive condition of all workers.....

The simple point is that anything is irrelevant to a student when it is thrust on him in a hierarchically controlled course, rather than stemming from his needs and his own individual enquiry; while any area of knowledge can be fascinating when it is directed by the individual's need and desire to understand the universe. ....We are going into the classrooms again this week to argue for boycott of exams. Resistance to all authoritarian assessment is a necessary step in building a revolutionary consciousness on campus. People must come to grips with their powerlessness before the prevailing atmosphere of despair and confusion is overcome. Hope lies in understanding the latent potency of our own conscious actions. A boycott must be a mass action which generates solidarity. Isolated actions will fail. As a small group we hope to generate an awareness of the situation. We can do no more than that until resistance spreads and the authority of lecturers is continually challenged. It is up to each individual to overcome his deference to authority, challenging both external authority and internal repression. We hope we will build people's confidence to resist, but it is the individual who must decide to act or to acquiesce.

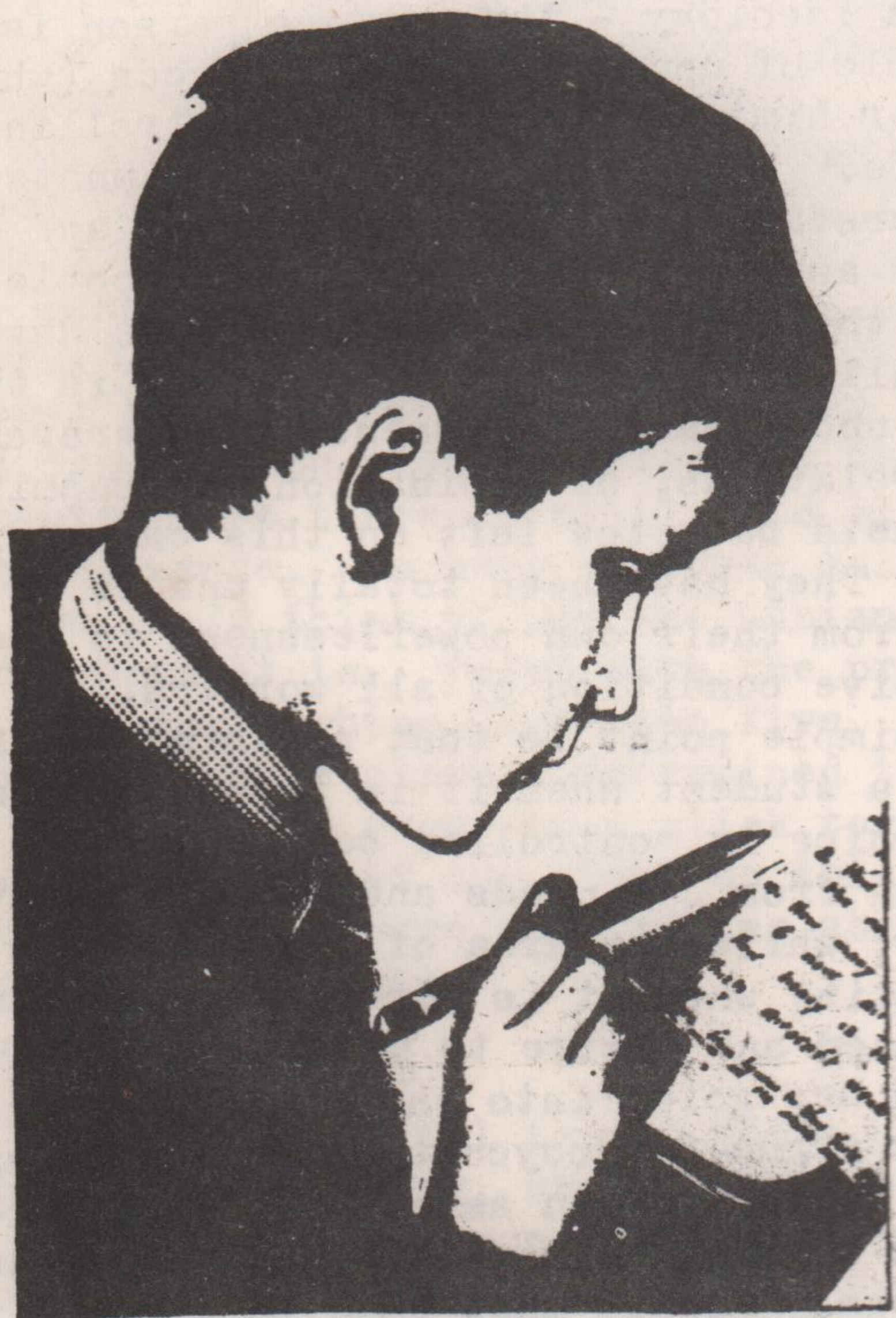
SELF\*MANAGEMENT GROUP  
UNI CELL  
FOR A SOCIETY BASED  
ON WORKERS' COUNCILS

This article, which was sent to us by Australian comrades, refers to the situation at Brisbane University.



# WHY EXAMS?

MICHAEL DUANE



This article has been lifted, with the permission of all concerned, from issue No. 5 of the now defunct magazine, Children's Rights.

Tests of competence for specific jobs are as old as man. They have always been part of the system of apprenticeship, and were part of the initiation rites that all cultures seem to have used in one form or another. Such tests were based on common sense. Was the boy who wanted to become a warrior able to tolerate pain and fear? Did the intending potter show the necessary skill, interest and patience to produce a pot that would be both durable and decorative? Could the boy who wanted full recognition as an adult, fish, farm, hunt and build so as to provide for children and other dependents?

In small societies the initiation rites were often just formalities because all the adults with whom the aspiring boy worked knew his skills and could agree without difficulty on the time

when his adult status would be publicly acknowledged. Similarly, apprenticeship was seen as a process of training spread over a period of three or five years according to the variety and ~~simple~~ complexity of the skills to be learned. As he mastered the different stages so he was given real work to do that, once it had passed the scrutiny of the master craftsman, was regarded as skilled work. The final product, signed or marked by the master himself, was very often, in fact, the work of one or more of his apprentices.

So, today, the apprentice plumber or the ~~large~~ surgeon in training carries out real work under the eye of the master who, by his approval, accepts responsibility for the quality of the result. While there have been many changes in ~~the~~ the form of such training and testing, there has been little criticism of the principle of such testing, or of exams designed to measure competence during and/or following training.

## TESTS FOR SELECTION

A second type of exam is that which selects a few from a large number of candidates, for places at a higher level in an elitist society. Such exams developed in ancient China when the increasing demand for administrators in an expanding empire could not be satisfied by recruitment within the upper stratum; and in modern industrial societies where the increasing complexity of control and administration demands more experts than the upper stratum of society can provide. So, in Britain, we have had:

(a) a series of secondary schools evolved to satisfy the needs of the ruling classes: public schools for their own children, with the most highly qualified staff, the most favourable ratio of staff to pupils and the most intensive system of education in boarding conditions; grammar schools for the middle and lower class who will become the middle-range professionals (teachers, nurses and local government officials) who exist to administer the various systems designed by the ruling classes; and secondary modern or so-called comprehensive schools (most simply re-grouped secondary moderns) for the working classes. In these schools we find the largest classes, the most poorly-paid and least qualified teachers and the shortest period of secondary schooling, so that the pupils achieve a minimal literacy and a deep conviction that they are capable of little more than manual work.

Consequently there has grown:

(b) a system of tests designed to pick out from the upper quarter of the working class - starting at the age of seven - those 'capable of profiting' by grammar school education and education in colleges or universities: the 'seven plus', the 'eleven plus' (nominally abolished but still operating in disguised forms in those local authorities, like London, which claim to have 'gone comprehensive'), and the 'eighteen plus'.

We have to be clear, in passing, that while this type of test selects, it does not guarantee that the successful candidate will remain in his new social rank. This task is carried out by the socialising (conditioning) function of the school. It is not enough, in the grammar school, to be clever; you must adopt, and be seen to adopt, the prevailing habits, values, speech-forms and dress characteristic of the middle classes. Hence the current war by grammar school staffs against



Schools Actio. Unions or similar associations of school pupils designed to protect themselves against assault or exploitation and, more positively, to claim a share in the formation of school policy. Hence the insistence on uniforms and deference to teachers; on religious and political conformity and, centrally, on the development of respect for any kind of authority deriving from the state.

#### OPPOSITION TO SELECTIVE TESTS

The fight against selective examinations of this type is, above all, a political fight against an elitist society, since those tests are an essential part of a competitive society. Those who maintain that such competition is 'healthy' or 'a natural instinct' confuse the preying of one species of life upon another (necessary to the ecological cycle) with the same-species aggression of rats under extremes of overcrowding, or the same-species sexual competition necessary to maintain functional competence.

#### EVIDENCE AGAINST EXAMINATIONS

##### 1. The Thirty Schools Experiment

Eight years before the last war a large-scale experiment was undertaken in America to release a group of schools from what was felt to be the oppressive burden of university entrance exams. Thirty schools were told that their pupils would be given entrance to any one of a group of universities on the say-so of the school principal and without any test or interview by the university. The universities would keep detailed records and report progress.

A 'control group' of pupils were selected from schools not taking part in the experiment. These pupils were matched for age, social background, religion, etc., and equally detailed records of these pupils kept by the universities for comparison with the experimental group.



The experimental group were free to make any alterations they wished in their organisation or curricula. Some, feeling they were already working on quite sound lines, made little or no alteration. At the other extreme some schools decided to take nothing for granted and sat down, staff and students together, to decide what they should do and how they should do it.

After eight years the universities published the results of the experiment (summarised by James Hemming in 'Teach Them To Live'). In an overall comparison of the control group with the experimental group the latter were found to have taken part much more fully in extra-curricular activities - political, social, dramatic, sporting and artistic - than the control group. In academic achievement the experimental group, similarly, gained the vast majority of academic awards and scored markedly higher than the control group. Only in two respects were the

control group better: attendance at church and the rote knowledge of modern languages.

When a further analysis of the results was made within the experimental group and a comparison made between the schools which had made little alteration to their traditional habits and those which had most radically re-cast their patterns of behaviour, it was found that the more experimental schools out-classed the more traditional schools in all respects.

Unfortunately the war interrupted the experiment in its full form. It had been hoped to follow up the careers of the students for some years after they had left the university in order to provide a long-term-study.

##### 2. Summerhill and Kilquhanity

It is hardly necessary to remind readers of this magazine (or this one - Lib.Ed.) that the two most progressive of the well-established progressive schools in Britain, Summerhill at Leiston in Suffolk and Kilquhanity at Kirkpatrick, Durham, Dumfriesshire, have never made examinations part of their work. Summerhill refuses ever to pressurise children to attend lessons. Both schools have, of course, attracted many children labelled as 'disturbed' because they found it impossible to fit into the state system. Yet in spite of their tiny sizes (Summerhill about 70 kids and Killy about 40) they have produced a disproportionately large number of highly competent craftsmen, farmers, doctors, teachers, artists, writers, social workers - people with a perhaps higher than average social responsibility in their work. Those whom I know personally display more vitality, better health, more humanity and joy in life than any other similar group of my acquaintance. They seem to be less burdened by hang-ups and prejudice, and better able to find rational solutions to personal problems than most people I have met.

##### 3. The Harvard experiment

A few years ago Harvard University advertised a series of degree courses to be open to anyone who applied, without any academic qualifications or tests for entry to the courses. Candidates were accepted on the basis of 'first come first served'. When the courses had ended it was found that the rate of successful completion of these degree courses was higher than for the normal degree courses in the university.

##### 4. The comprehensive ideal

In actual practice the so-called comprehensive schools are, in the main, as tradition-bound as other state schools. Entry to them is determined by procedures no different in principle from the 11 plus, certainly for the upper streams in these schools.



Some time ago a student asked me whether or not he should take his CSE exams. He explained that he disagreed with the principle of exams, and said that it worried him to think that he was helping to prop up a bad system if he tamely submitted to the farce like everybody else. After some hesitation I advised him to take his exams. Since I had already taken plenty myself, and possessed the bits of paper that proved I could teach, I thought it would be hypocritical to advise someone else to make a solitary protest. More important, I thought that his solitary protest would be a useless gesture. Action against exams, if it is to achieve any change in the system, must be collective.

# NO

There have been a number of examples, especially since 1968, of individuals tearing up exam papers and of attempts to organise the mass boycott of them. Last year at York University some Social Science students organised a picket of their Part 1 exams, which resulted in about half of the students taking part in a boycott. Question papers were subsequently given out, and all students had the option of returning completed papers within two weeks. And, as an example of how to fight the demands of course work, students at Keele University for a while operated a successful 'switchboard', which was a filing system containing sets of notes and essays, to which a student could refer when given a particular assignment. On a much bigger scale, the boycott which took place in France in 1968 had considerable success, since all students were later declared to have passed.

However, France in 1968 was in a revolutionary situation where all the values and institutions of capitalist hierarchical society came under attack. Since we are not quite in that kind of situation in this country yet - unfortunately - it might be useful to consider what can be done here and now. There are at least three factors involved, all of which are inter-related, but it will be easier to deal with them separately:

1. The status of the people involved.
2. The amount of support.
3. The institution under attack and the nature of the opposition.

## THE STATUS OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

A headmaster has more power to change things in his school than a first-year student (whether he should have is a different matter). But everyone, at whatever place in the system, has the opportunity to attack some manifestations of the exam mania. Students, if organised at least on a class basis, could, as suggested in 'The Little Red School Book', hand in blank papers or boycott their internal exams, or press for reforms such as being told the questions in advance. Teachers on the shop floor should do all in their power to resist demands that they should grade their students as part of the usual productivity deal.

Whether or not one is in a better position to change things at 'higher' levels of the hierarchy, I'm not sure. Friends of mine who are heads of departments assure me that they are in a better

position to bend the CSE syllabus towards their students' needs than I am; to which I reply that it is the nature of a hierarchical system to corrupt those who start to climb. Both statements have their truth. And I know headmasters who are trying to reform the exam system - but how many are doing so? And is continuous assessment necessarily an improvement? And are more far-reaching reforms from above remotely possible?

## THE AMOUNT OF SUPPORT

"There is no such thing as an isolated revolutionary act. Acts that can transform society take place in association with others, and form part of a general movement that follows its own laws of growth. All revolutionary activity is collective, and hence involves a degree of organisation. What we challenge is not the need for this but the need for a revolutionary leadership, the need for a party". (D. COHN BENDIT)

## (OBSOLETE COMMUNISM - THE LEFT WING ALTERNATIVE

This is, no doubt, obvious, but the implications are worth considering. At this moment there is widespread criticism of exams and grading (try reading anything by Neill, Duane, Holt, Illich, Reimer, Denison, Postman, Kohl, etc.) and at the same time, in inverse proportion it seems, the grading/examining/certificating process spreads ever wider. Subjects apparently immune are succumbing; the number of people taking exams of all kinds continues to increase; anarchist prisoners graduate in Spanish. And how many teachers ~~are~~ speak to favour scrapping exams? (How many, for that matter, have heard of Neill, Duane, Holt, etc?) There would appear to be, in other words, a large and possibly increasing gulf between the critique of a radical minority, and the generally held opinions and practice of society at large. How many non-teaching anarchists accept uncritically the idea that schooling is good? How many parents make any criticism of the values that schools are inculcating in their children, let alone of the practice of inculcating anything, or of enforcing it by the threat of punishment or exam?

No doubt there is a time-lag between the inception of an idea and its ultimate acceptance. No doubt, too, the methods of teacher-training colleges are usually such that the last things students are encouraged to feel any interest for

# EXAMS ~

are ideas about education. The fact remains that with parents largely acquiescent and teachers largely hostile to change, we have a very long way to go to get effective parent/teacher action against the system. A small possibility is that a local branch of the NUT might come under Rank-and-File control, and work for change in that area. Otherwise, its going to be a long, hard slog - unless, that is, we are blessed with a '68 situation, and no longer have to depend on reform from above. In France in 1968, let it be said again, it was the students who took the initiative in challenging exams and every other manifestation of capitalist hierarchical society. Students led; the rest of society followed. The conclusion might be that the NUS and the NUSS deserve all our support in the campaigns they



initiate. Far better that students should take action than that they should accept what is offered. The action of 100 students in striking for a demand is infinitely more valuable than every headmasters' conference that ever took place.

# NO

## THE INSTITUTION UNDER ATTACK AND THE NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION

It might appear to be a general principle that, the higher the place a given institution occupies in the educational hierarchy, the harder it will be to attack. Class tests are dispensable; degree finals are sacrosanct. On the other hand, to refer back to the previous section for a moment, we have seen that degree finals are vulnerable when most students attack them, whereas first-year students in secondary schools have usually neither the consciousness nor the organisation to challenge the most trifling test.

However, the status of a particular exam is important. Those that control entry to successive steps in the pyramid are crucial. It is at least conceivable that internal exams in schools and universities will gradually disappear, but, as long as our society is built on hierarchical and elitist assumptions, there will have to be some means of selecting those people who are judged fit to ascend to the next stage. Exams perform this function very well, because they appear to be fair. Promotion is based on merit rather than wealth or accent - or so it is claimed; and, as I've already said, the radical critique of this position has not yet percolated through to parents and teachers.

on might go, but the fundamental critique would remain. It is the disease we are attacking - not that students worry about exams, but that education has nothing whatever to do with the selection procedures required by a hierarchical society.

So let it be clearly understood that in attacking exams we are not seeking 'better' forms of assessment. We are against all forms of assessment.

Or nearly all. It will be objected that tests of competence in, say, brain surgery, will always be necessary. Certainly, with the qualification that far more people could be competent surgeons in an egalitarian society that dispensed with the mystification of 'professionalism'. But, in any case, this objection does not count for much. Probably some people will always be better at doing some things than everybody else, but, in a non-hierarchical society, this will not lead to the creation of an elite. The brain surgeon, the porter, the nurse and the patient will all have an equal voice in the running of the hospital. The surgeon might have had to pass a test of some kind in order to perform operations, but passing it need only give him the right to operate, and need not give him a far bigger wage than everybody else nor a higher status. In other words, we are against all forms of assessment that qualify some people for entry to higher levels in hierarchical society.

Attacking all such forms of assessment involves an attack on hierarchical society itself. To raise the demand for 'no assessment' is to ask for something that cannot be granted today, because the granting of it would imply a new, non-hierarchical society. It is therefore a revolutionary demand, and will be resisted not merely by the educational establishment, but by all the forces of capitalism including the Conservative and Labour Parties, and by all authoritarian parties of the Right and Left.

# ASSESSMENT!

To attack these crucial exams is the hardest task of all, because they perform an essential function within the system. In fact one is no longer using 'educational' arguments only, but 'political' ones as well; one is attacking hierarchical society itself.

Two objections may be raised to this. First, that all exams could be dispensed with and alternative selection procedures used. Second, that the 11+ was 'crucial', and is disappearing.

To answer the second point first: the 11-plus is disappearing simply because the comprehensive idea made it redundant, and the comprehensives can perform all the process of grading and streaming and selection within their own walls, while appearing to be based on egalitarian principles. Need I add that I am not advocating a return to the ridiculous tripartite arrangement.

The first point is obviously true. Exams perform an essential function, but it is the function that is essential; and there are alternative ways of performing it. Exams are a symptom, not the disease. But the point is that whatever form of assessment and selection was used would come in for almost exactly the same criticisms. The arguments about tension and so

The opposition is therefore formidable. But I am not advocating acquiescence, in pointing this out. We need to be aware what we are up against, and then campaign with all our strength on the slogan, 'NO EXAMS: NO ASSESSMENT'. We should also press for any reforms that seem in the offing, but, in so doing, never lose sight of the long-term strategy. Such a campaign would perform the function of any revolutionary demand in a pre-revolutionary situation: it would wrest the initiative from the enemy and force him on to the defensive and it would provide a focal point for all genuinely revolutionary forces. Implicit in that statement is the idea of organisation. Should we work within Rank and File - or do we need to revive the Libertarian Teachers' Association? ●

JOHN BOOTH



In the abrupt and final language of the educational authorities five boys in the Fifth form of Cordeaux High School, Louth (a Lincolnshire market town) have been suspended, charged with a number of misdemeanours including vandalism, theft, bullying, disobedience and persistent ill-mannered behaviour. When I questioned the Head about the suspension he added that they had shown a marked lack of gratitude for the things that had been done for them - "we have bent over backwards to accommodate them". Apart from their various acts of misbehaviour the fundamental action of these boys was on entering their ROSLA year to refuse point blank to be taught at all. The most that was achieved was to get them to engage in discussions on various topics from time to time.

it objected. He then tried to play the hard man and in reaching out to grab the boy in question dug a pen he was holding into the boy's hand, drawing blood. He grabbed the boy by the shirt front. The boy struggled and fought back. His shirt was torn. The boy asked to be allowed out of the room and was refused - so he went out of the window. Later another boy asked to go to the toilet, was refused, and went out of the window. The teacher wanted to discuss something to do with Biafra, and handed out a pile of leaflets, asking the boys to pass them round. The boys did - all of them, hand to hand, like 'pass the parcel'. On the day of the suspensions however these incidents were reported in a rather inaccurate way. "They physically assaulted a teacher, and were pouring out of the

# THE SCAPEGOATS

The suspension however is not a simple dismissal from the school. It is intended that they do not return. No alternatives have been arranged; the authority seems content to submit them to a barrage of questions and investigation, including social, medical and psychological reports. The aim is to find out 'what is wrong with them' since, as one of the local education chiefs has put it, it is incomprehensible that boys of this age should behave in the way they have done. Among the various things they have done or attempted, one that is symptomatic of their relations with the school authority is that they tried to organise a petition to secure the right of pupils to choose the member of staff who would be given charge of them under the newly introduced pastoral care scheme. Most fifth formers refused to sign on the grounds that they might be victimised or otherwise get into trouble. Certain members of staff to whom they had taken a particular dislike were persistently badgered and taunted in the corridors. From time to time they appear to have set fire to waste paper baskets, plastic cups in the drinks machine, and to have done other minor acts of damage, e.g. to fire extinguishers. A large proportion of acts attributed to them were however done by other pupils. They were accused of disobedience to the point of total uncontrol and even violence; indeed were one to accept all the charges at their face value, they have done everything bad that is possible. In practice however most such charges are exaggerated. The prime examples involve a new head of department who when he took them for the first time had an immediate hostile reaction.

He has a rather pompous sounding voice, and employs such terms as 'chaps'. Naturally the boys began to make fun of this, and he became fair game in their minds. He asked them to move their chairs into a semi-circle; they refused. He pushed one of the desks, and the pupil behind

window, refusing to be taught and being totally unreasonable."

## MISUNDERSTOOD? HOOLIGANS?

It would be a mistake to go through every incident trying to sort out the truth of what happened. Basically the boys admit that they did many things wrong, and that certainly they had no intention of being taught. But accepting the charges at their face value one would be tempted to dismiss the lads as hooligans and delinquents, amoral and nihilistic. Meet them and talk to them, singly or as a group, and they are clearly sensitive, warm and generous young men. They are physically adult, regard themselves as adult, and are looked upon and treated as such outside of school. To submit them to the kind of investigations they are now undergoing is to make possible a whitewash job exculpating the school of any responsibility for their behaviour.

In each case it would not be hard to find 'causes' for their actions: shared among them (since I do not wish to point to any specific individual case in these respects) they have two broken families, one case of unstable temperament, a host of family difficulties. Yet talking to them again and it is clear that none of these factors have any bearing whatsoever on the incidents. They are all perfectly well adjusted to these various background 'deficiencies'. And there are no (as yet) social and psychiatric examinations of the school as a whole or of particular teachers; yet five minutes in the staffroom and one can hear and see plenty of evidence of neuroses being taken out on the children.

Perhaps the most interesting facet is the accusation of ingratitude. The Head informed me, for example, that one member of staff who had been the target of their badgering, almost the prime target, had the previous term taken them



all camping in the Lake District, quote, "doing all the driving and cooking". I questioned the boys about this. They described it in rather different terms: the teacher in question had been arrogant and had continually put them down, e.g. "I'd better do the cooking, as you lot are not capable". The Head also claims to have bent over backwards to be accomodating and tolerant, and to "provide an interesting and varied curriculum" for them. Certainly there was tolerance, but to claim that anything positive was done let alone achieved is a downright lie. Certain teachers were allocated to them to do particular things; all the teachers found it impossible to do anything because their programmes were in fact not in the slightest bit interesting (I include myself in that, as I was employed as a temporary teacher to "use my F.E. background" - my first act, to them, was the umpteenth time that somebody had tried to begin discussion and thought about the implications of the energy crisis, and they simply could not have cared less whether or not I had anything new or different to contribute.) The truth of the matter is in fact, that after a few weeks in which they had disrupted the normal classes doing CSE work they were separated off without any real prior preparation or discussion with them of what they would like to be able to do. For them, as for all children involved, there was no preparation for ROSLA, nobody wanted it, and in the case of this school the situation was further exasperated by the domination of CSE work and transfer to the grammar at 14 instead of 11.

#### BLAME?

Perhaps the blame does not entirely rest with the Head who was new to the school in September, and therefore inherited the situation. The boys consider however that he has mismanaged the whole affair and in their eyes is 'two-faced'. Without wishing to be unkind or to paint the Head as an ogre (which he is not), that description is not entirely inaccurate. Part of his problem is that he wishes to be liberal but his senior staff are inclined the other way. The result is that he comes out in staff meetings with such pearlrs as, when referring to the need to re-establish firm order over the Fifth form. "I do not want an atmosphere of repression, I do not wish to have an imposed discipline, I wish to impose self-discipline." (my emphasis).

The truth of these incidents is that the suspended five are being used as the scapegoats for the total failure of the school to have any real meaning for most of the pupils. The first three years are dedicated to the selection of some 35 candidates (out of 130) for the grammar school at the age of 14, to further select those capable of doing CSE work in particular subjects. The final two years is dedicated to CSE. For the non-academic pupil (as they are called) there is no meaningful provision. In the first three years they do exactly the same syllabus as the other pupils in their years; for the final two they more often than not simply go through the motions of the CSE work without sitting the exams. There is a small stream of pupils considered too hopeless even for that, and to quote one teacher, "they might just as well play football in the yard as twiddle their thumbs messing about with various pointless tasks in

their classes".

By turning these lads (the only ones to challenge the meaninglessness of the school by replying with equally aimless and nihilistic behaviour, refusing to cooperate in the charade), over to the local authority Gestapo; by directing the staff to the restoration of discipline; and above all by completely blacking out any reports in the Press, local or otherwise, the authorities have sought to escape the only logical and rational explanation - that something is rotten in the state of Cordeaux and education in general.

#### MEANINGLESS CURRICULUM

Since the school curriculum is so meaningless (those taking CSE do so frequently because they see no alternative, unlike the five lads) the only way one can examine the school's process is to look at the wider aspects of the school's effects on the pupils.

Most obvious to the superficial observer who is at all critical and alive, is the emphasis in school assemblies, tellings off, and disciplinary procedures on respect for authority, patriotism, class collaboration and grassing. The fundamental theme is the oft-repeated plea for cooperation, community, respect for each other. Unfortunately the teacher who is genuine with the kids, and is able to enjoy friendly relations with them, is the very teacher who makes this work. The teacher who is brutal, dogmatic, unpleasant, tyrannical, in fact makes the whole thing an obvious lie and sabotages the process. Without the gentle, well-meaning teachers the school war would hot up considerably.

Since much of the activity expected of the children is neither meaningful nor pleasant, the second most obvious process is the inculcation of the Protestant work ethic. That is, that we



invest sacrifice and suffering in the school world in order to enjoy the rewards that await us outside. Fortunately in this part of the world it is not hard for the kids to see that the rewards are so scanty and unevenly shared out that the process of indoctrination in this respect is not very efficient in many cases, at least without the all too often present assistance of parental support and advocacy of the same doctrine. School is good for you.

Since much of the school's work is concerned with sorting and grading into different exam streams, a third factor brought to bear is the idea of a hierarchy of standards and rewards.

Contd. page 18



# EXAM

# RESISTANCE



Insofar as we work towards the liberation of existing school establishments (however difficult - perhaps even impossible - the task might prove to be) it is useful to consider the points at which the system is most vulnerable to attack. Thus we can look at the examination set-up as the keystone of the system - remove it and the whole edifice collapses - tamper with it, alter it or replace it with something else (like assessment) and stresses, strains and cracks are likely to be exposed: to be exploited before the structure settles happily into place once more.

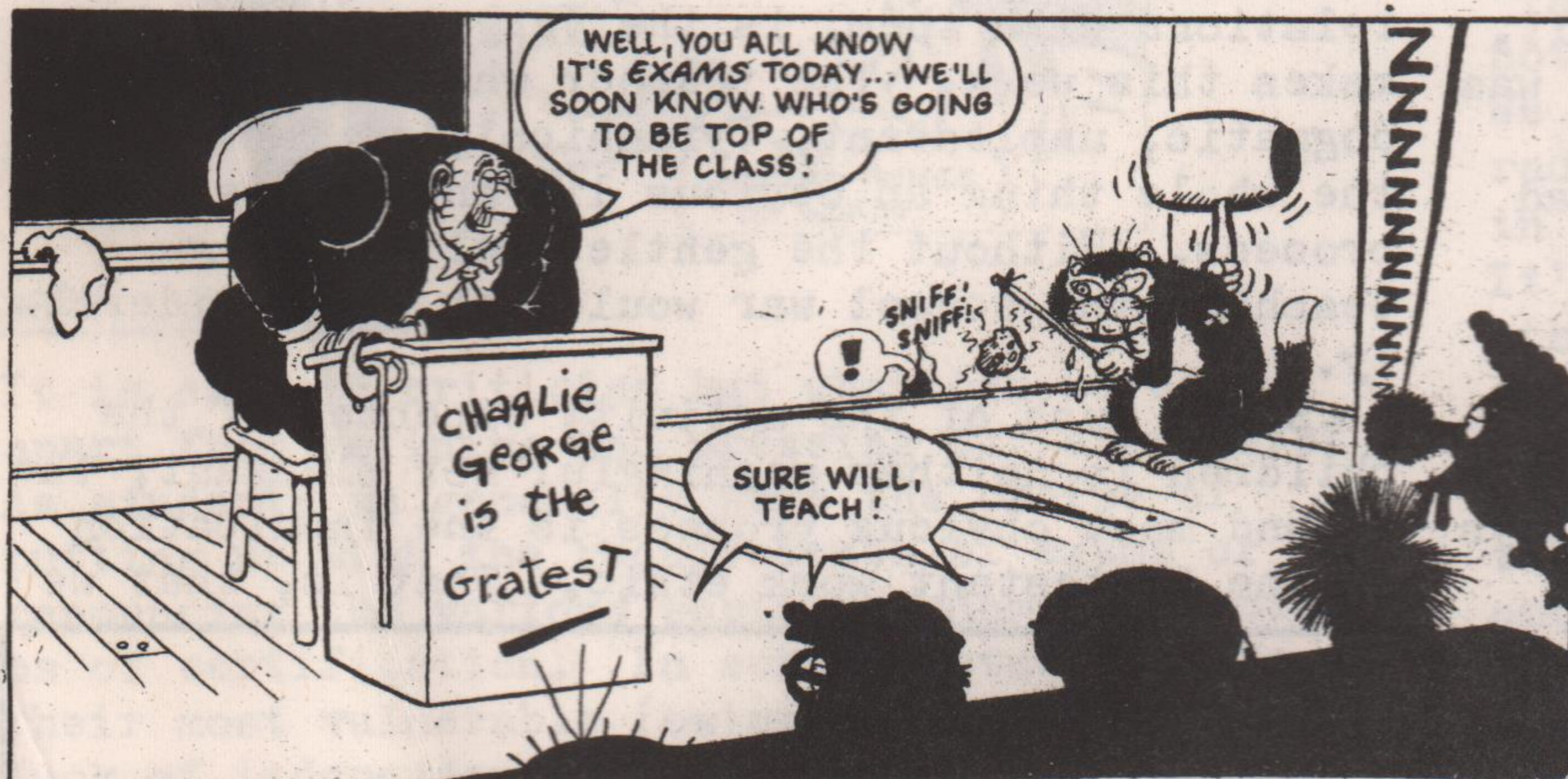
The importance of exams to the system can be used in various ways. At the very least we can keep up a constant attack - through discussions, pamphlets, letters, etc - on the whole idea of assessment/examination and on specific examples of impossible/irrelevant/meaningless questions set at all levels. Readers who are or who have been involved with exams of any kind and in any capacity are invited to submit anti-exam ammunition for publication in future issues of Lib. Ed.



## OBJECTIVE TESTS OF COMPETANCE?

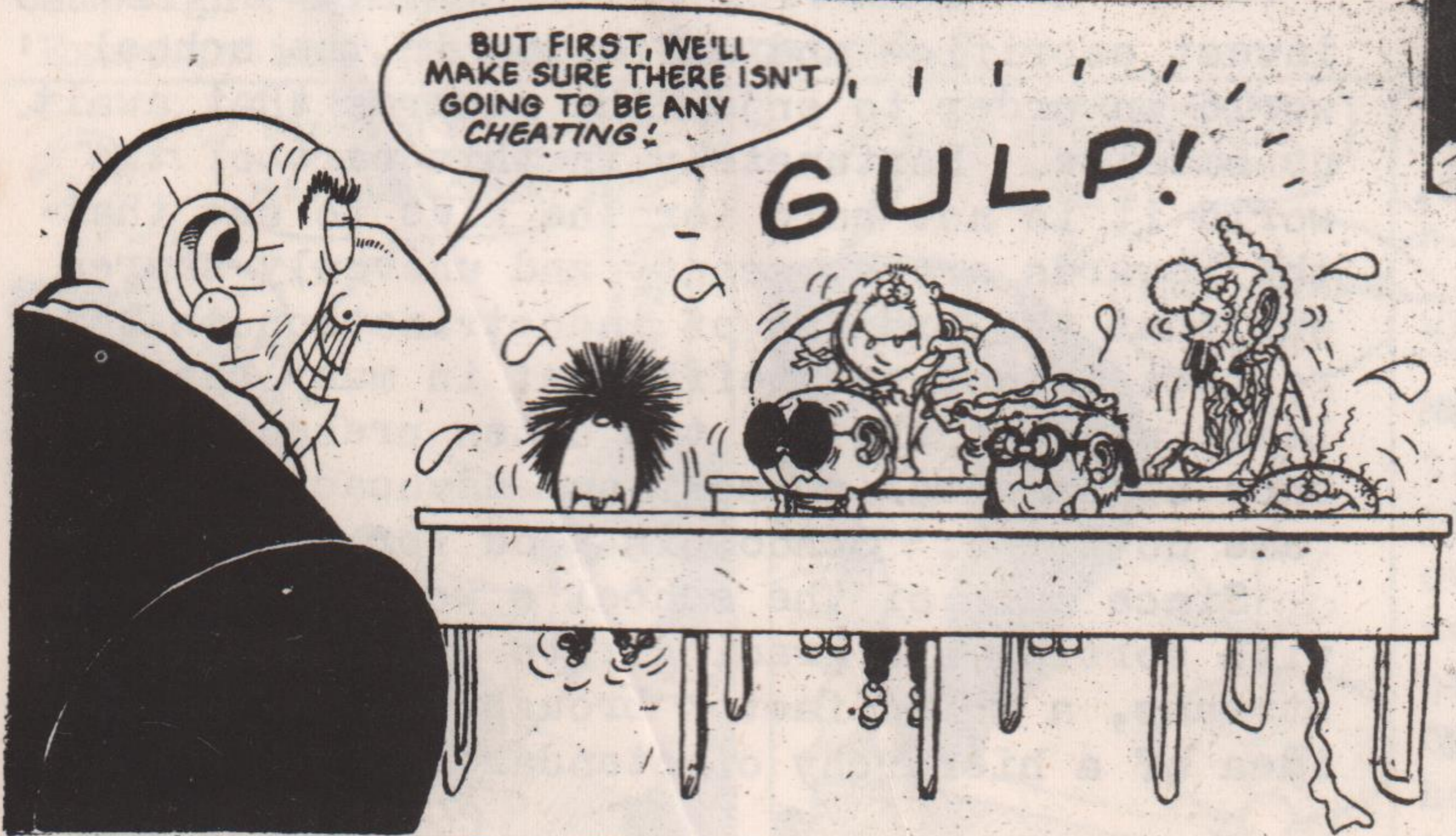
The best recent attack on the reliability, objectivity and relevance of examinations, especially 'essay-type', is to be found in Tom Fawthrop's pamphlet, 'Education or Examination' (1968). He points out the inevitable errors and discrepancies caused by differences (between universities and between departments within universities) in marking standards; ranges of marks awarded; criteria; pre-determined numbers of 'passes' to be awarded; range of subject matter; etc. All this apart from the personal bias of the examiner, which is not effectively modified by the work of 'external examiners'. Having amplified this exposure of the unreliability of exam results he goes on to list 17 variables which are "among the more important factors that determine the performance of the examinee, and these are all irrelevant to the individual's intellectual capacity (i.e. intellectual capacity may or may not coincide with them - there is no necessary correlation).

"These influences are:-



The purpose of this article is to point to some of the arguments which might be useful to any of us who feel the need to challenge those who uphold the values of competition and 'excellence' (as demonstrated by examination success). In practice it is often not difficult to get people to accept that, in

their subject, exams are more or less irrelevant/harmful/unfair. The real problem is to persuade them to accept the only realistic answer to their inevitable, "But, what will you put in their place?" — "Nothing".

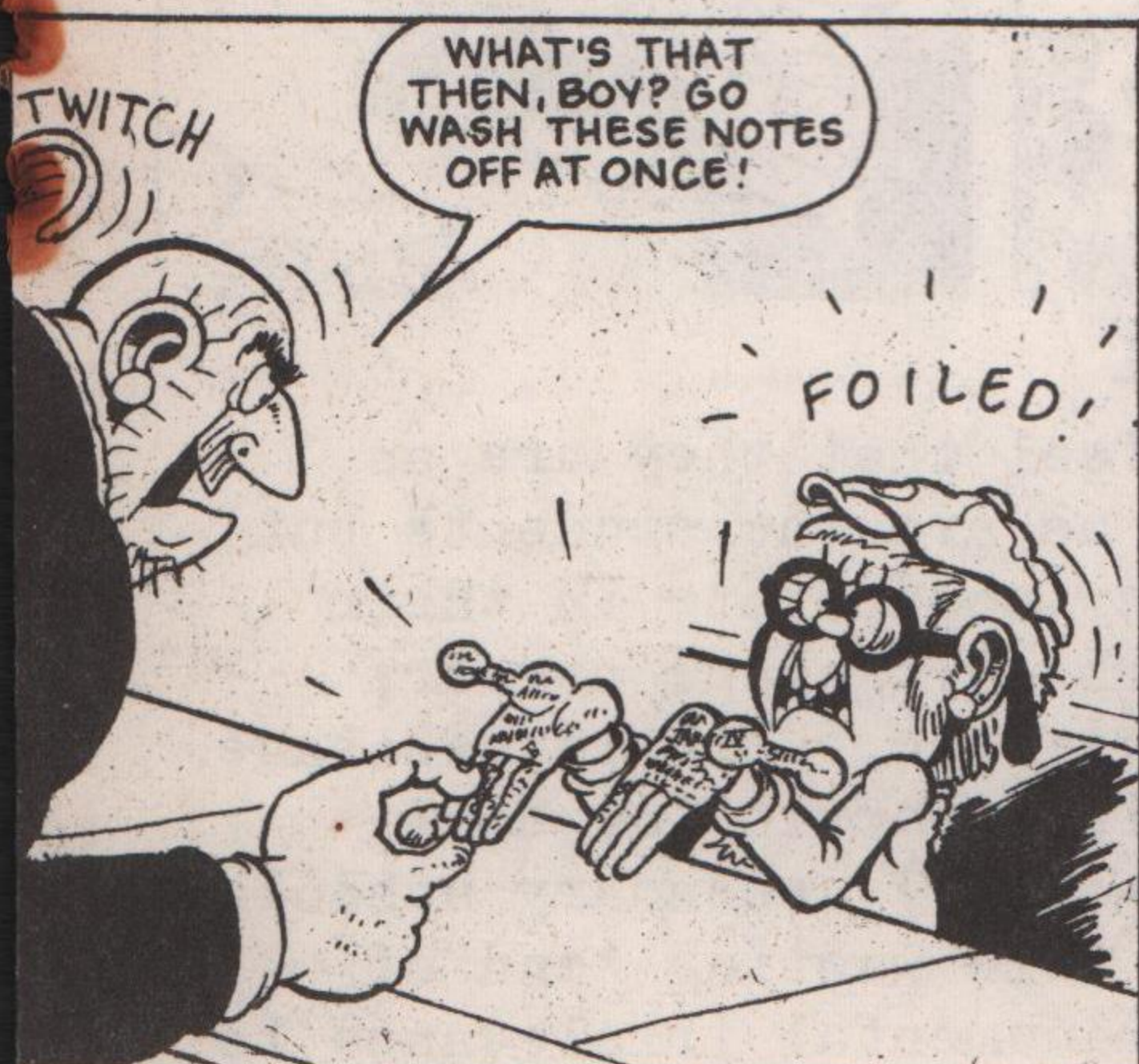


- (i) Examination technique, i.e. proficiency at examinations, ability to adapt to examination requirements.
- (ii) Speed - both in thinking and writing.
- (iii) Timing - ability to conform to the time allowed for each question (the student who knows too much may be penalised!)
- (iv) 'Question Spotting' or 'exam-telepathy', perhaps the most important factor of all.
- (v) Luck - the right question(s) just happening to come up.



- (vi) Normal variance of performance.
- (vii) Quality of teaching, i.e. good 'examination teaching'.
- (viii) Ability to persuade/deceive the marker of your intellectual worth.
- (ix) Ability to 'cram' huge chunks of knowledge into one's mind just long enough for an examination.
- (x) Individual capacity to indulge in a 'memory-orgy'.
- (xi) Individual's skill at 'cheating'.
- (xii) The degree of motivation for success, fear of failure, etc.
- (xiii) The strength of motivation to conform - 'give examiners what they want' attitude - a form of examination strategy designed specifically not to offend the personal views of one's tutor.
- (xiv) Ability to make the correct choice of examination questions (inside the hall).
- (xv) Capacity to undergo psychological pressures - stress and strain.
- (xvi) Specific social or emotional problems occurring near examination time.
- (xvii) Students' ignorance of requirements of the examiner, criteria for marking, etc."

Another important point is that exams just don't do the job they are supposed to - they don't sort out all the right people for the right jobs or universities. Ask a few employers what they think about the relevance of the exams their young employees have just taken (but don't take too much notice of the answers you get - the idea is to destroy their arguments for exams!). And what about School/University drop-outs? Quite simply there is no known correlation between academic 'success' and success in any subsequent field of endeavour (except perhaps academic fields).



## EXAMINATIONS AND CURRICULUM

However, strong (and useful) as these arguments are, they miss the real libertarian arguments against exams and assessment. One of these is that their very existence makes specific and anti-educational assumptions about the point of learning/education - that it is to gain assessed certification of some kind. Thus absurd and irrelevant exams, which can inevitably test only certain limited, pre-ordained elements of a subject, thereby distort the study of that subject. Further distortion arises from the fact that exam-passing is too often simply a matter of collecting/regurgitating facts and other peoples' opinions - it is often far easier to take an exam in a subject that you are good at but not very interested in than one in which you are good and interested. Crazy or not? An example of the pernicious effect of exams on curriculum can be seen if we look at the situation of oral English in schools. We might almost take as a motto of our education system: "Shut up and get on with your work!" (in latin, of course). However, in recent years, a lot of good work has been published by people like the National Association for the Teaching of English and Penguin Books pointing out the glaring deficiency of most schools in their treatment of the spoken language. Such an effective case has been made out that people have actually started to take notice. With what result? The establishment of an exam of course!



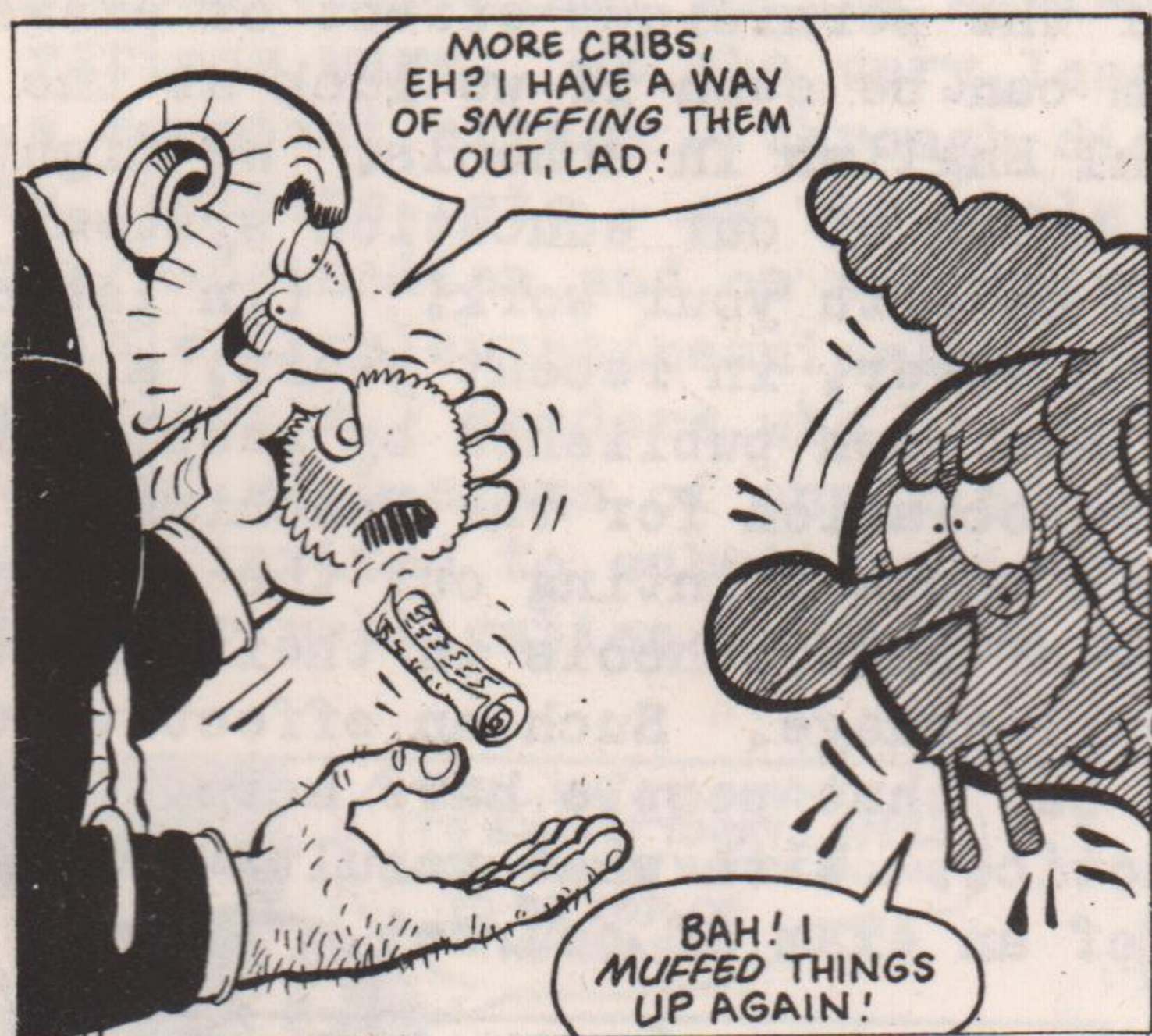
"The subject known as 'Oral English'....now figures prominently in the CSE examination, with predictable effects - it is now taken seriously in some schools. It is a sad fact that in order to establish a new 'subject' in the curriculum, the quickest means is to examine it. We would be optimistic if we concluded that people now recognized the importance of kids talking - it may merely mean that teachers now allow children to talk once a week, for forty minutes - one at a time, of course. Certainly a study of the examination syllabuses will show how superficial is the agreement, how restricted and unimaginative the situations in which talk is to be assessed..... It might be cynically argued that by recognizing oral English, by honouring it with an exam, even with special symbols so that it stands out in our school timetable, we have shelved the problem not solved it. For it is the characteristic delusion of many teachers in this country that if something is examined it is also being taught." J.W.Patrick Creber ('Lost for Words', Penguin, 1972)

This situation applies to a lot of other subjects, too - and one might add that there is a similar delusion among teachers that if something is taught that it is also being learned.



EXAMINATIONS AND CONTROL

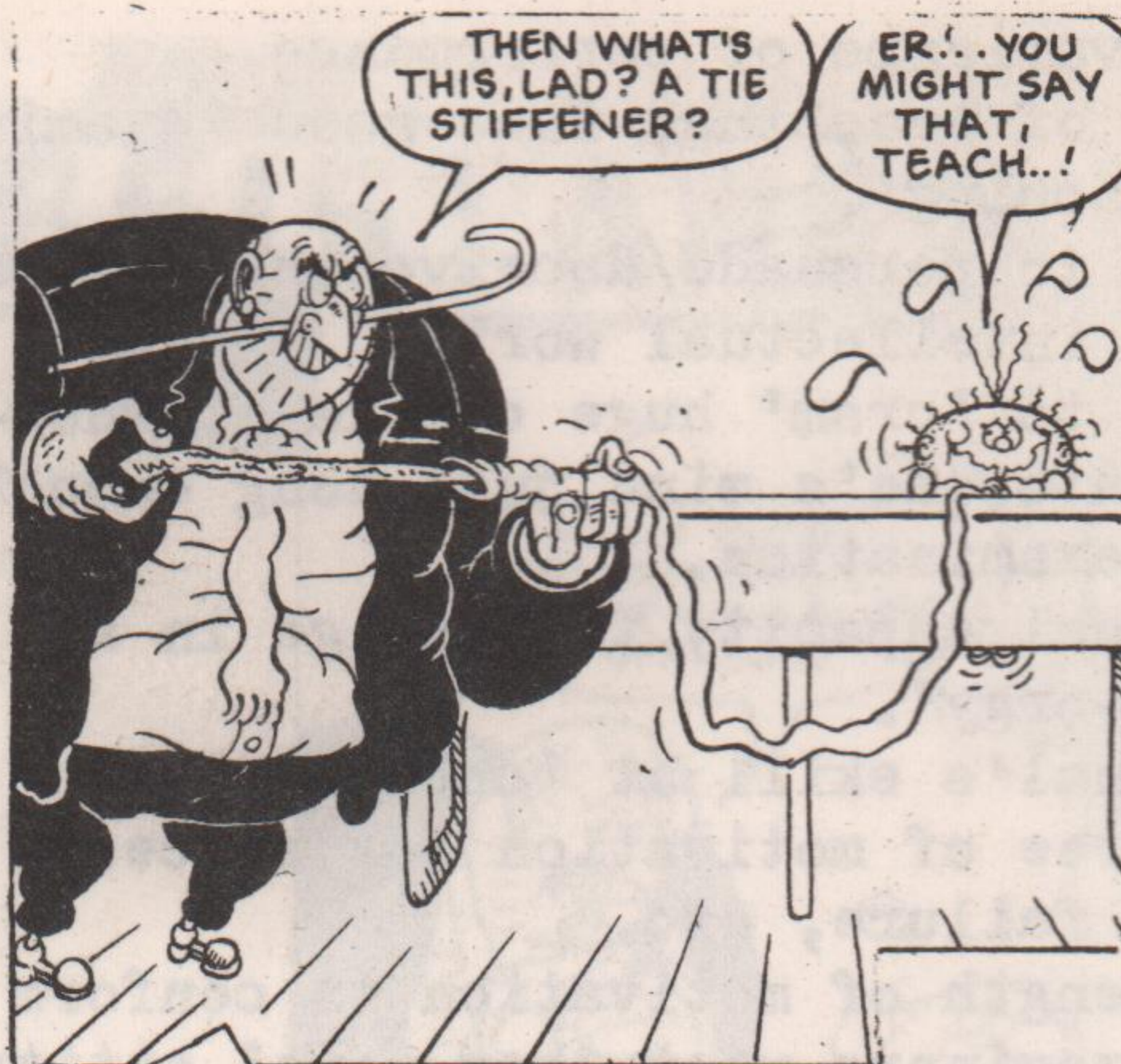
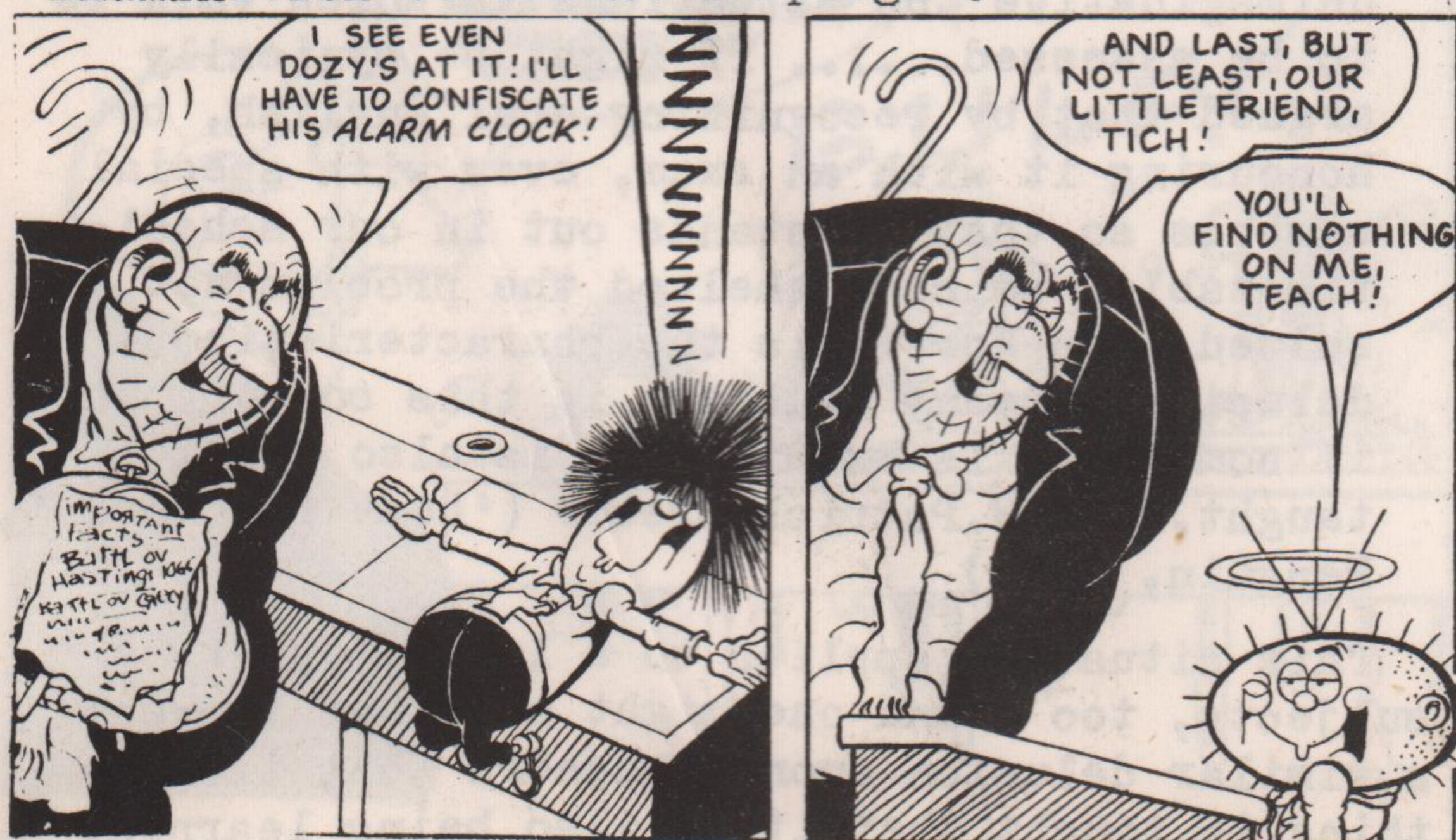
Another political case against exams (and all other forms of assessment) is the way in which such devices are used to control the student body - to ensure conformity - to reinforce the fear of authority - to establish the fear of failure. They are used to sort us out into those who can go on to further education and those who can't - those who get the jobs they want and those who don't - those who get the influential academic/political/media positions and those who don't. It doesn't always work efficiently but it does often enough. There are enough of us who accept the value of such things (or who are not convinced that the system can be effectively challenged) and are prepared to put up with the humiliations involved in ensuring that we get them to make the whole con-trick work.



WHAT THEN DO WE DO?

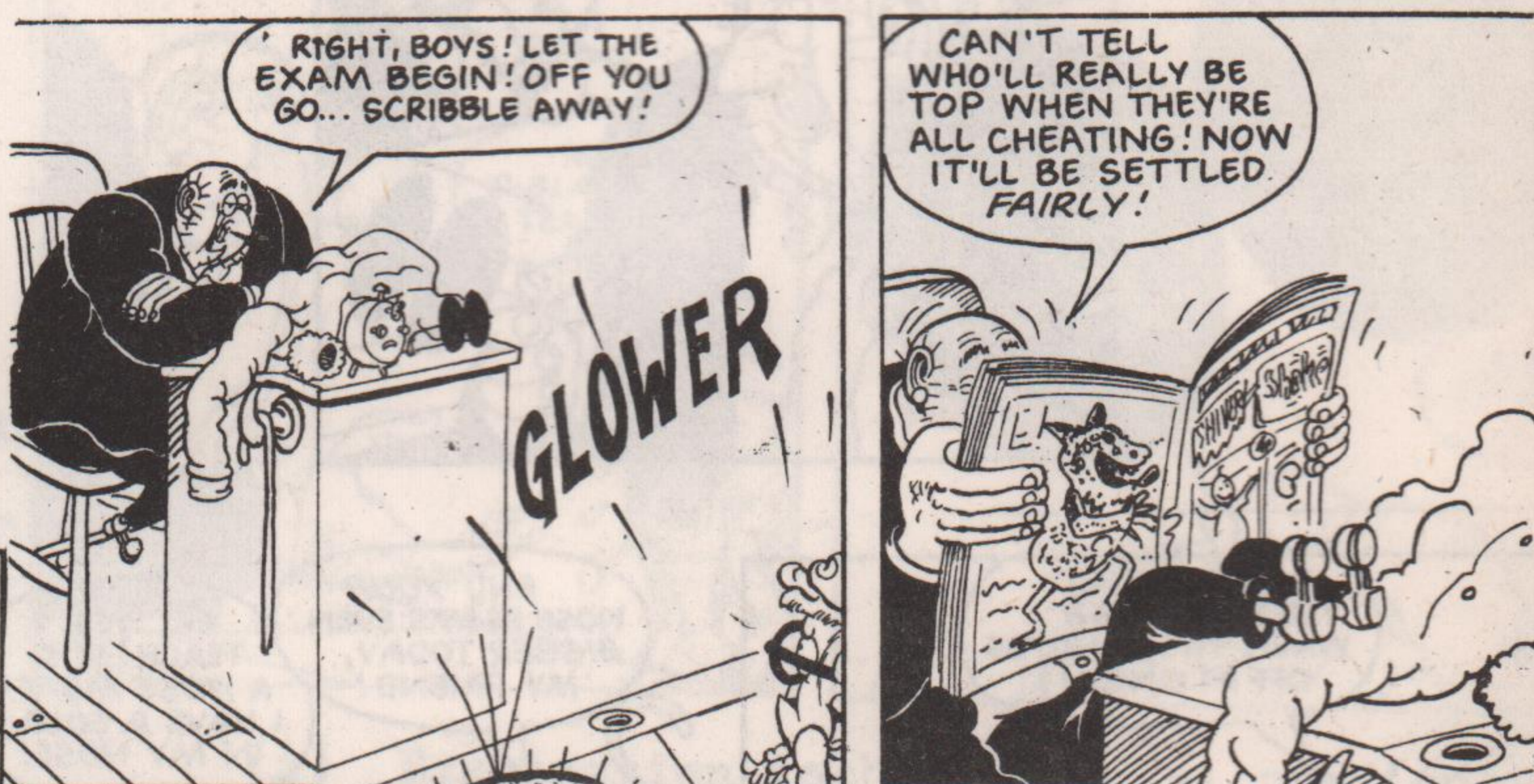
It is easy to criticise but what can we do, apart from refining and pressing our arguments? As students we generally have the choice of putting up with the requirements of exams or renouncing the various social/economic advantages of certification. In schools students are at their most vulnerable (owing to their personal lack of independence) and it takes a remarkable degree of self-knowledge and self-confidence to fight against the system. The only realistic hope lies in schoolkids working together through such organisations as the Schools Action Union and the N.U.S.S. (if such bodies remain directly responsive to the effective control of their members) to begin to take control of their own lives and especially their education.

As far as students in higher education are concerned we have lessons to learn from the examples of France in May, 1968; the struggles at the Hornsey College of Art and the sporadic campaigns against exams, including the L.S.E. 'Examination Statement Campaign':.



"The idea of the campaign was simplicity itself. We would try to organise a boycott of the Part I exam by getting as many students as possible to sign a joint statement declaring their intention to boycott the exam provided that the number of signatures equalled half of the total number of students registered for the exam. In short, we were campaigning for a majority boycott. The campaign was centred around collecting these signatures, which was no easy task as this was not the usual petition but a commitment, albeit conditional, to action. The point was not missed by anyone.

"The beauty of the campaign was that we were not demanding anything from the authorities. We weren't asking for any reform, however radical. This was planning for direct action in its purest sense - demands upon ourselves. It's very much easier to make demands upon other people: upon the system, or to support other people's struggles, but committing oneself to activity is much more profoundly subversive to the system. By the end of two terms' agitation and propaganda, we had obtained about sixty signatures or so, with the result, of course, that the boycott did not come off; it would have needed at least 150 signatures to proceed. However 60 was quite a large number considering that no-one signed without thought or before much debate and discussion." Bob Dent ('LSE: a question of degree', Solidarity, 1972)



WHAT ABOUT THE TEACHERS?

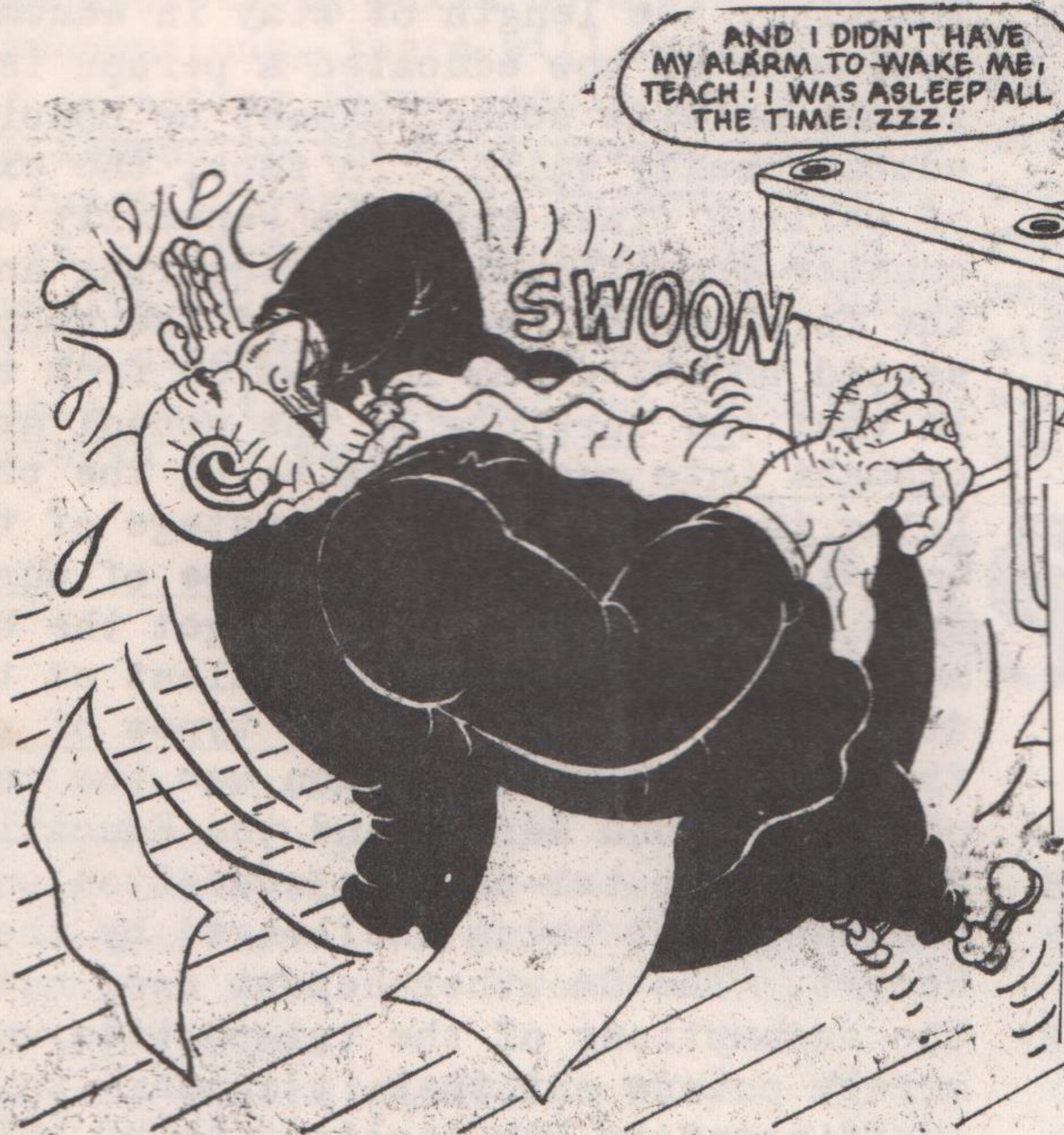
Most teachers probably feel that they are as trapped by the 'system' as are the students but this is true only if they co-operate in their own enslavement - through mortgages; career; submission to 'authority'; etc. Simple sabotage of the system is a possible tactic for some comrades. Many (most? - all?) secondary schools hold anxiety making and time wasting 'end of term/year exams' whose monumental irrelevance to



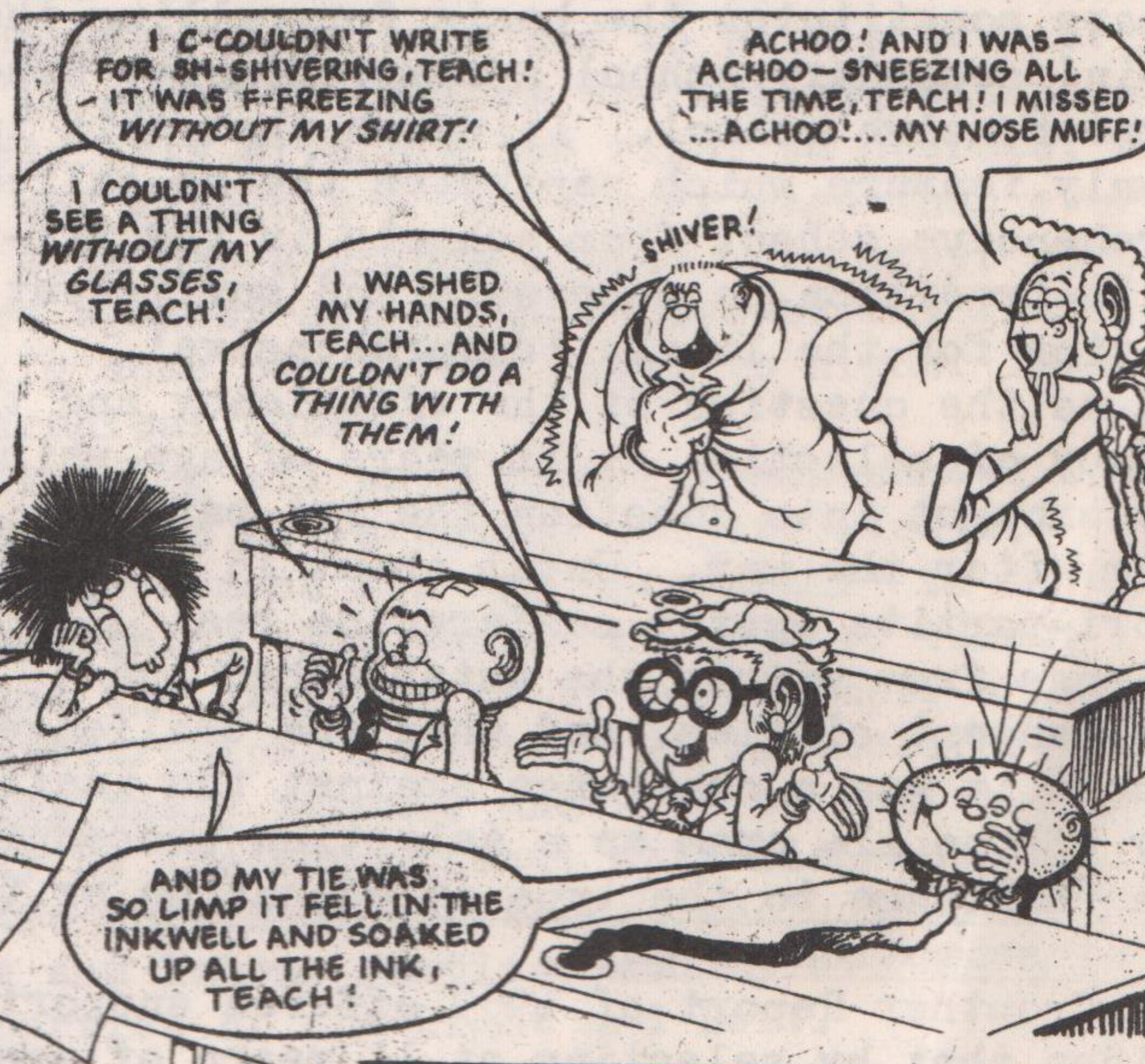
the acquisition of knowledge and/or understanding must be pretty clear even to those who spend so much time setting, administering and marking them (and then 'threaten' to stop doing it if they don't get more money!). In practice many of these are quite useless even as a preparation for 'proper' exams but when a whole school is subjected to them (whether the kids involved are likely to take external exams or not) they take on an air of cruel fantasy. (Of course such exams are set also to produce graded class lists which help to strengthen the sense of failure among those who generally come near the bottom.)



This administrative convenience - often disguised as a liberal concern that the - er - non-academic kids should not feel left out or that they have been written off (although they have - well, let's face it old boy, some people have got what it takes, others haven't - it's very sad, no doubt, but you've got to face the facts).



"If you must grade, grade as seldom, as privately, and as easily as possible..... Specifically, if we have to submit a grade or report card once a term, or quarter, or semester, that should be the only mark we give the child in that period..... If the children feel that they are all in some kind of race and if everyone knows who are winners and who are losers, the losers are going to try to protect what little is left of their pride and dignity by getting out of the race, by refusing to run..... There is absolutely no excuse for a teacher or a school to fail a student. We are there for them, not they for us. If a student spends a year in my class and learns something, I have no right to fail him. I must find a way to give him some positive and legitimate credit for whatever he has learned. If at the end of a year he has truly learned nothing, then I - not he - am the one who should be failed." John Holt ('What Do I Do Monday', Pitman, 1970)



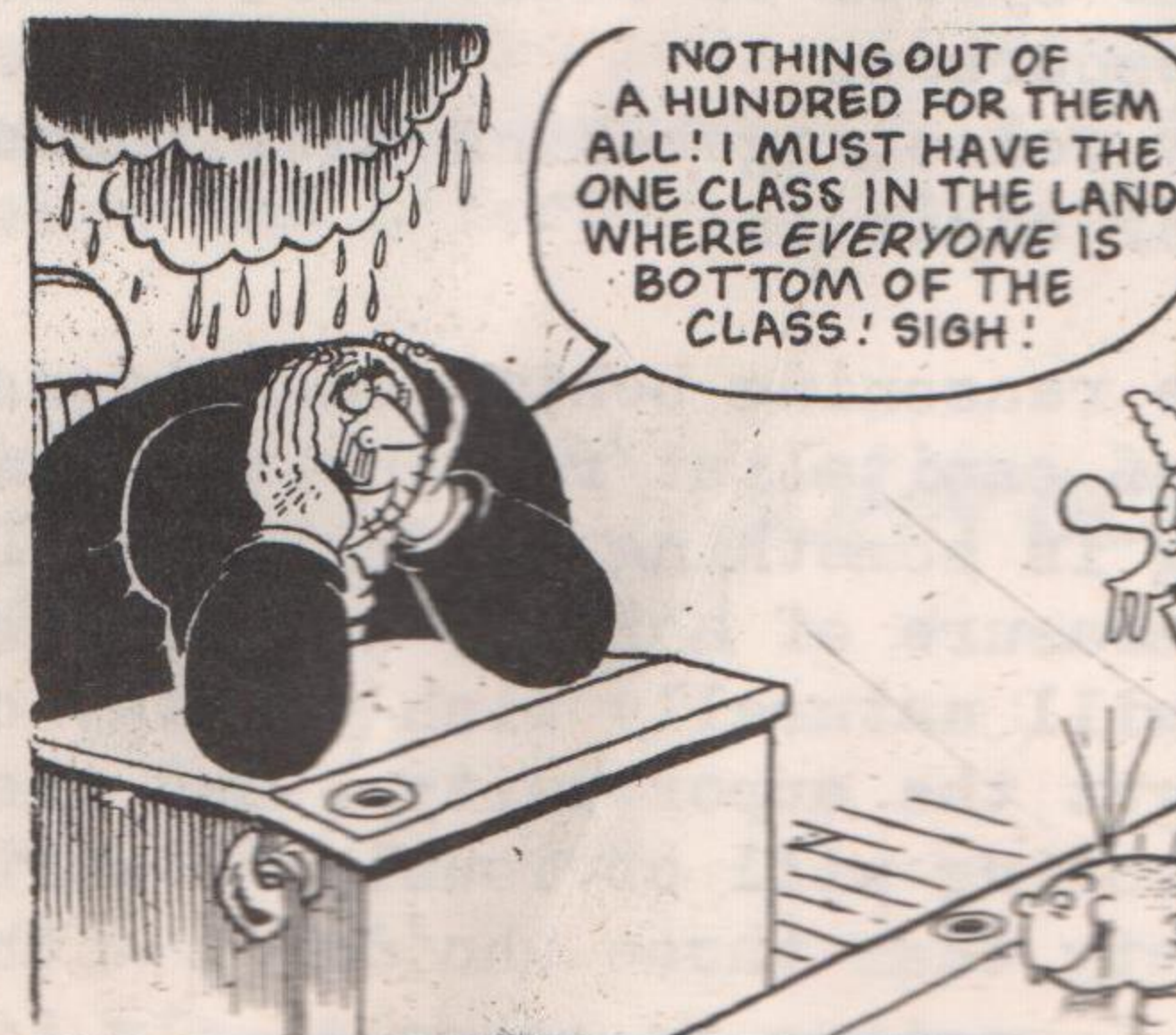
**BUT, WHAT ABOUT STANDARDS?**

Finally, none of the above comments are to be interpreted as denying the fact that learning is a difficult, demanding process - subject to continual and ruthless reassessment, adjustment and rejection by all involved in the learning process. What is claimed is that assessment and examination in order to classify, grade and select is a perversion of the educative process and a violence to the students involved.

**Arthur HUMPHREY**

Possible tactics in the face of this kind of set-up include the refusal to set/administer/mark such tests. This will, of course, appeal more to those who feel fairly secure or reckless and it stands more chance of success if one's Head/head of department/etc is concerned or even if they just wish to present a liberal/trendy/progressive image. In less favourable situations it will be necessary to build up arguments based on whatever useful research material might be available - using any sympathetic staff members or advisors there are around.

As far as weekly/termly/etc grading is concerned all teachers can at least take the advice of John Holt:





# TAKING THE LID OFF CROWTHER

(THE ORGANISATION OF COMPREHENSIVE  
SCHOOLS AND THE 11+)

The abolition of selection at the age of 11 years constitutes the basis for calling the 'all-in' secondary school a comprehensive school. It seems that this is the only feature which separates the so-called comprehensive school from schools in the tri-partite tradition, a necessary and sufficient condition for the label, 'comprehensive'.

It was the question of the efficiency and the adequacy of selection at 11 years of age which first brought into question the tri-partite system after the war. Until about 15 years ago the tri-partite system suffered no real challenge from within the established and establishment circles, and when the challenge did come it was a challenge against the inefficiency of the 11+ exam as a selection procedure, not a challenge to the type of education or the idea of selection as such.

The Crowther Report of 1959 offered support to the idea that by selecting at 11 years of age the nation was "wasting a lot of talent". Brains that were worthy of better education, and therefore producing more for the state, were being excluded from the education process through the selection procedure at this early age. The Report argued that some of the nation's ablest men were leaving school early and not getting the education they deserve. It is worth noting that as the Report concentrated on National Service recruits it did not take into account the women of the country, but then they may have felt justified in this since they probably considered women to be of less economic value whether they received schooling or not! And this is the point; the concern of the Report is not with any altruistic educational reform, it is with the "wastage of resources", - the failure of the system to capitalize on its intelligence resources.

Now the reasoning behind such ideas is a good example of capitalist

Now the reasoning behind such ideas is a good example of capitalist/repressive thinking. The reasoning is something as follows:- I.Q. tests offer a measure of ability - those who have this ability will naturally wish to stay on at school if they get the opportunity - and those who get more schooling will obviously be worth more to the society than those who don't - therefore it is worth investing in schools only if they make

the most of their resources, i.e. if talent is not wasted. Now the role of intelligence and I.Q. testing has been dealt with in LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION 12 and it is sufficient to say here that the only talent which I.Q. tests show is the talent to do I.Q. tests. They are in no way a measure of ability since 'ability' is not measurable (even if it were desirable to measure it). We see also the assumption that anyone who has this so-called ability will want to go on to get the most and the 'best' schooling available. With more than a touch of irony we may say that if you did want to measure ability perhaps the best measure would be the lack of desire to stay on at school since schooling is prone to stifling much of the creative ability of its inmates. And then there's the question of whether the most educated people in the country are those who are most valuable. Since the criterion at hand appears to be a material one, I take this to mean that the more educated people in the country are those who produce the wealth!! Anyone not seeing the fallacy of this reasoning might benefit from a reading of Marx.

Two other interesting points arise from the Crowther Report. Firstly, the association of 'education' with 'schooling' current in so much of capitalist/repressive thought is blatantly expressed in this Report, a point with which Libertarian 'educationalists' will obviously disagree. According to this repressive line of thinking, the length of stay in education is the indicator of how educated a person is and experiences outside school cannot be considered as educationally valid. In fact, the experiences of working class kids are generally seen as counter-educational, and requiring antidotes in the form of the 'culture' of the school. The second point, which follows on from the first, is that the workings of the school are never brought into question as being the problem or as being the cause of this "wastage of talent" - only the selection of the type of pupil to the type of school such that we get the best/most results from the input of talent at the school's disposal. Now the idea of types of pupils fitting types of education was the cornerstone of the Norwood Report and the Education Act 1944 which set up tri-partite education and is obviously not being challenged by the Crowther Report. The Crowther Report does not challenge the assumptions of the tri-partite system, it merely points out that it appears to be a little inefficient in its application of selection.

And whilst the call for abolition of selection at 11 years of age does not stem directly from the Crowther Report, it certainly finds some backing in the Report's findings. It has been claimed that the call for the abolition of selection at 11 years came from middle class parents who found that their kids were failing at the 11+ exam, which may not be altogether unfounded....

What I am arguing here is that the abolition of the 11+ exam and the implementation of 'comprehensive' schooling answers the need for the maximization of output rather than any desire to see fairness in the educational system. If selection at 11+ prevents the maximum output then it has to be abolished.

The organization of comprehensive schooling today points to the fact that there is more



concern with the 'efficiency' of the schooling than with educational and pedagogic innovations. The majority are still considered organizationally as factories, having input, output, and of course some notion of 'quality control'. (As libertarians we see them as organizationally akin to prisons with their stigmatizing function, but this is worthy of more time than it can receive here.) If the sole basis of calling a school 'comprehensive' is that the input is no longer the result of selection at 11 years, there is no reason to suppose that things will differ much between the so-called comprehensive school and schools in the tri-partite system. Both will work within the assumptions of capitalist technocracy that input and output (ability and performance) can be labelled and measured, and concern themselves with the processing of the inputs along structured lines until at the end there is a product which is educated to the best of its ability. In the tri-partite system the grammar schools educated the 'academic' kids who could handle abstract material (sic) while the secondary moderns coped with the 'non-academic' kids by giving them material of a more 'practical' nature. In the comprehensives this selecting into types takes a more subtle form in the establishment of setting and streaming which swiftly labels pupils and directs their school career. My own research in London comprehensive schools at the moment shows that, even where there are definite attempts on the part of staff to break with this traditional mode of education, the selection and labelling on the criteria of 'ability' and 'behaviour' still continues. Others have shown how, once established, a pupil's school identity is then reinforced and becomes eventually a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, even if selection does not take place at 11 years, if the basis of the schooling has not altered, such a selection will take place in the school itself. Comprehensive schools do not abolish selection, they only abolish selection at the age of 11.

Pedagogic innovations which do occur in comprehensive schools owe nothing to the fact that the schools are called comprehensive. There is no reason why a comprehensive school should differ from a secondary or grammar in anything but the selection process at 11. The majority of comprehensives retain traditional organizational features such as time periods for lessons with one particular teacher, some ideas of standards of dress, streams and sets for different subjects, standards of classroom behaviour based on silence and immobility of the pupils etc. To what degree these features are

etc. To what degree these features are to be found may be a point of debate, but certainly they appear in comprehensives to an extent which makes them both comparable to and not dissimilar from tri-partite education.

Selection still takes place in comprehensives, and it takes place on a social class basis similar in method to traditional, biased selection procedures. This is because selection is necessary as an efficient means of processing 'suitable' pupils through exams and thus maintaining a high 'output'. Exams, though, are based on the notion that attributes can be quantified and measured, which itself relates to the capitalist technocratic view of education and Man.

It is this type of reasoning which supports the repressive 'myth' of capitalism. It is this which accounts for the analogy between schools and factories. It is this type of reasoning which is diametrically opposed to Libertarian principles●

## MARTYN DENSCOMBE



The experimental group were free to make any alterations they wished in their organisation or curricula. Some, feeling they were already working on quite sound lines, made little or no alteration. At the other extreme some schools decided to take nothing for granted and sat down, staff and students together, to decide what they should do and how they should do it.

After eight years the universities published the results of the experiment (summarised by James Hemming in 'Teach Them To Live'). In an overall comparison of the control group with the experimental group the latter were found to have taken part much more fully in extra-curricular activities - political, social, dramatic, sporting and artistic - than the control group. In academic achievement the experimental group, similarly, gained the vast majority of academic awards and scored markedly higher than the control group. Only in two respects were the

### 3. The Harvard experiment

A few years ago Harvard University advertised a series of degree courses to be open to anyone who applied, without any academic qualifications or tests for entry to the courses. Candidates were accepted on the basis of 'first come first server'. When the courses had ended it was found that the rate of successful completion of these degree courses was higher than for the normal degree courses in the university.

### 4. The comprehensive ideal

In actual practice the so-called comprehensive schools are, in the main, as tradition-bound as other state schools. Entry to them is determined by procedures no different in principle from the 11 plus, certainly for the upper streams in these schools.



# E D U C A T I O N I N P R I S O N

This article was smuggled out of Gartree Prison, Leicestershire, recently.

Rehabilitation has for a long time been something of a joke in British prisons, though the laugh it raises is somewhat hollow. However one clear light in an otherwise bleak landscape has been the limited but surprisingly effective educational programmes instituted in many prisons. In this one respect Gartree has been a leader in the field. Educational programmes at every level are organised here, from part-time evening recreational and academic classes to full-time studies in basic education, technical trade studies and higher education studies, including degree level courses under the Open University. The people who scoff at the idea of rehabilitation should see these men who are participating, many of whom society has written off as worthless, hardened criminals. They spend their days and evenings, heads buried in weighty tomes, wrestling with philosophy or sociology or mathematics. Those same scoffers would do well to listen in on some of the conversations and discussions. The subject matter would not be future crimes being planned or past exploits glamorised as they might expect, rather it would be the sociology of Durkheim or Weber, the politics of Mill or Hegel, attack. Since we are not quite in that kind of situation in this country yet - unfortunately - it might be useful to consider what can be done here and now. There are at least three factors involved, all of which are inter-related, but it will be easier to deal with them separately:

1. The status of the people involved.
2. The amount of support.
3. The institution under attack and the nature of the opposition.

## THE STATUS OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

A headmaster has more power to change things in his school than a first-year student (whether he should have is a different matter). But everyone, at whatever place in the system, has the opportunity to attack some manifestations of the exam mania. Students, if organised at least on a class basis, could, as suggested in 'The Little Red School Book', hand in blank papers or boycott their internal exams, or press for reforms such as being told the questions in advance. Teachers on the shop floor should do all in their power to resist demands that they should grade their students as part of the usual productivity deal.

Whether or not one is in a better position to change things at 'higher' levels of the hierarchy, I'm not sure. Friends of mine who are heads of departments assure me that they are in a better

ly it matters little what the need for education is of a particular population, or whether a particular system is efficacious, or whether there is available any suitable alternative occupation. Education is a function solely of population in the little book of the little man in the little office in Eccleston Square, W.1. This week, having done his computations and consulted his actuarial tables, he has found that a population of 180 inmates does not require a thriving, dynamic, successful education unit. Thus for us the book must be put aside, the pen replaced by the mail-bag, and Socrates give way to the scrubber.

As from Jan 1st the comprehensive evening-class programme of approximately 70 classes per week is to be pared down to a pathetic 17. All the full-time courses are to be stopped. The technical drawing courses is to be scrapped completely; the basic education classes, as far as we can determine at present, are also being wound up; the higher education unit is to continue to operate but on a totally unrealistic and inadequate day release basis. The work, the aspirations, the hopes of all the participants, staff and inmates alike, are being butchered, and butchered merely for the sake of a statistic.

The prison population is now 180. There are only two workshops in operation which together employ 67 men; additionally a number of men are required for service occupations, cooks, order-

exam:  
No doubt there is a time-lag between the inception of an idea and its ultimate acceptance. No doubt, too, the methods of teacher-training colleges are usually such that the last things students are encouraged to feel any interest for

## EXAMS ~

are ideas about education. The fact remains that with parents largely acquiescent and teachers largely hostile to change, we have a very long way to go to get effective parent/teacher action against the system. A small possibility is that a local branch of the NUT might come under Rank-and-File control, and work for change in that area. Otherwise, its going to be a long, hard slog - unless, that is, we are blessed with a '68 situation, and no longer have to depend on reform from above. In France in 1968, let it be said again, it was the students who took the initiative in challenging exams and every other manifestation of capitalist hierarchical society. Students led; the rest of society followed. The conclusion might be that the NUS and the NUSS deserve all our support in the campaigns they



## WHY EXAMS? .... from p.5

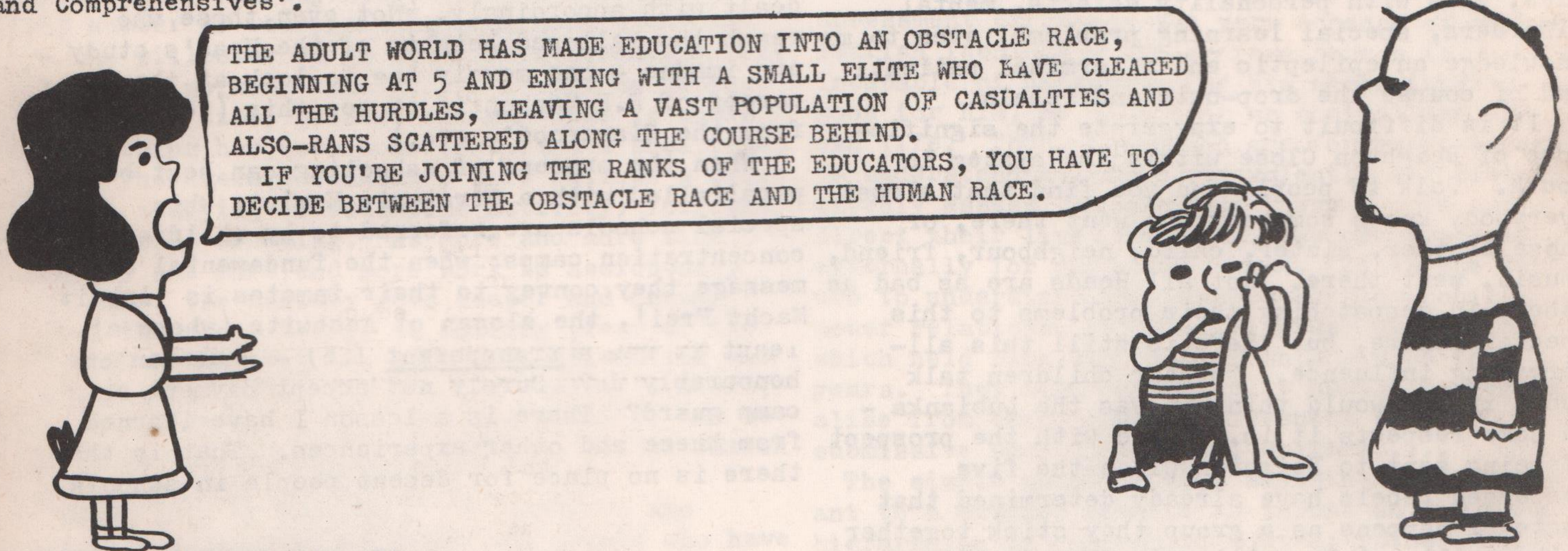
In theory they represent the type of secondary school that should emerge from consideration of the mass of evidence on selection that has exposed not only the social injustice of the separate grammar and modern schools, but the sheer ~~ineff~~ inefficiency of all selective tests claiming to be 'objective'.

The demand for common schools and a common culture goes back to the TUC conferences at the end of the nineteenth century (see Brian Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School*). But how effectively the ambitions of the middle class in general and of the middle class teaching profession in particular (in spite of their 'unanimous' demand for comprehensive schools) have frustrated the comprehensive ideal, can be seen in 'Half Way There' by Brian Simon and Caroline Benn, a survey of nearly 700 comprehensive schools; in the National Foundation for Educational Research study 'Comprehensive Schools in Action', and in Julienne Ford's 'Social Class and Comprehensives'.

will have a big advantage over children brought up in the poorer and less competitive sectors of the population. These tests therefore have an inbuilt bias that favours middle class children.

In fact more than 50 per cent of primary children are not even entered for these tests since, in the eyes of their teachers and the administrators, the results are a foregone conclusion and money is saved by the L.E.A. on buying and marking tests for them.

The logical result of applying such tests to both middle and working-class candidates would appear to be that working-class candidates even if 'successful' in gaining entry to e.g. the grammar school will be under severe strain and will be among the first casualties. This is borne out in 'Education and the Working Class' by Jackson and Marsden and by the report of the D.E.S. entitled 'Early Leaving' where it appears that working class pupils are over-represented among those who leave the grammar school before they have completed the normal course.



### CULTURE AND EXAMINATIONS

Clearly a child who is brought up from birth to be competitive will, if he is not made into a nervous mess, do better at exams than a child who is not. Prof. P.E.Vernon in 'Intelligence and Cultural Environment' reports on the difficulty found in 1948 in administering an intelligence test to children in the Hebrides.

'She (the tester) was particularly struck by their reluctance to work at speed, and attributes this to "the unhurried, untrammelled mode of existence", which makes them "temperamentally unresponsive to the pressure of time". In 1965 when testing boys in Stornoway it was found that "sometimes their Highland canniness was manifested in over-logical or argumentative reactions to test items that struck them as silly".'

In talking about the application of tests in non-western cultures Vernon writes, 'In other ethnic groups, particularly when testees have not been exposed to schooling, the culture pattern ~~is~~ may be entirely different, and the whole test situation meaningless. Competition for personal gain may be frowned upon. Important problems are discussed co-operatively with the elders of the tribe, not left to individual initiative.'

Now since in Britain the 11 plus or the ~~various~~ various tests and 'profiles' that have replaced it all depend on individual and often timed work, children brought up in the highly competitive culture of the middle and upper middle classes

In 'Race, Culture and Intelligence' (Penguin 1972) John Daniels and Vincent Houghton write, 'There is essentially no difference between an examination system and a system based upon psychometric assessment (i.e. intelligence tests etc.). Both are used for social-role allocation; in the Soviet Union the examination system is better because a purely hereditary principle would have been ideologically unacceptable. Of the two systems, the one which is likely to last longer is the examination system because of its lack of pretence to a scientific rationale. If the demands of society change, then, theoretically, an examination system could change in quite an arbitrary way, untrammelled by assumptions which are not concerned or supported by so-called scientific notions of the "properties of man". Both methodologies, the examination system and psychometry, will undoubtedly be with us for some considerable time to come, and will only be replaced when another system of role allocation suggests itself as technocratic development reaches its point of explosion.'

'We have put forward the thesis that both examination and psychometric tests have outlived their usefulness because, by their very nature, they cannot adapt to the changing needs of society. They play a key role in allocating pupils to special ~~roles~~ roles within society at the same time as they claim objectivity, i.e. truth irrespective of the society in which they are used.'



## THE SCAPEGOATS.... from p.9

One comes to learn one's place, and to classify oneself as bright or thick, to value oneself as a useful person, all in the light of one's ability to cope with a series of meaningless activities which are largely irrelevant otherwise to the rest of your life.

Slowly but surely children are atomised in the face of the Educational Juggernaut, since the process and the institutions are so big, so remote, so far out of reach, so pervading and so inevitable, that most children cannot come to grips with it and assert their integrity against it.

There are of course those who do assert their integrity by revolt. They are classed as disturbed, e.s.n., abnormal, needing special treatment. They are despatched post haste to Deighton Close, the local educational dustbin. All the flotsam and jetsam who do not fit smoothly into the normal school pattern go there. Those who find it difficult to get on with other kids, kids with personality defects, mental disorders, special learning problems, even to my knowledge an epileptic and a terminal patient; and of course the drop-outs and rebels.

It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of Deighton Close within the system in Louth. Talk to people and you find that almost everybody knows somebody who went there, or whose brother, sister, child, neighbour, friend, cousin, went there. Not all Heads are as bad as others in despatching their problems to this special centre, but there is still this all-pervading influence. To hear children talk about it you would think it was the Lubianka - in some respects it is. Faced with the prospect of being sent to Deighton Close the five suspended rebels have already determined that whatever happens as a group they stick together - they will not be split up. They do this instinctively, with a sure gut-feeling about what is happening to them.

### WHAT ABOUT THE TEACHERS?

What of the teachers in all this? There are of course those, the majority, who consider that nothing is fundamentally wrong, and that only the children are to blame, because they are thick, stupid, etc. There are those so wrapped up in their own speciality that any wider

comprehension of the system is out of their range of vision. Practically all are not prepared to live beyond each day and whether somebody is absent and their classes have to be covered. And there are also those who are deep in thought and perplexity because this is all far from their idealised vision of what education is or ought to be about. Slowly, inexorably, those in this last group stumble towards an understanding of the evil and pernicious character of schools; but they tend to do it in isolation and they end by simply leaving, first for another school, then out of the profession. One is forced to conclude that there would be nothing they could do in remaining anyhow. In such an all-embracing ideological totality as a school all attempts to make things better become simply tools to stabilise the fundamental rottenness of the institution. If one attempts subversion, by encouraging revolt (and if one chooses to stay then one should) then inevitably one is sooner or later faced with the position of having to publicly oppose the school authority and be dealt with accordingly. Not even those who reach the hallowed heights of the Head's study are immune - one merely has to look at the career of R.F.Mackenzie to see this ('escape from the Classroom', etc.)

When the process of schooling can best be paralleled with a Strategic Hamlet; when special schools are referred to by children as concentration camps; when the fundamental social message they convey to their inmates is 'Arbeit Macht Frei', the slogan of Auschwitz (where at least it was a transparent lie) - what can one honourably do? Surely not accept payment as a camp guard? There is a lesson I have learned from these and other experiences. That is that there is no place for decent people in schools.

**Martin BASHFORTH**  
**Camp Guard**  
**No.67-97469**

(N.B. They order these things more flamboyantly in Leicestershire. We hear that boys recently chucked out of the Melton Mowbray Upper School have had personal tutors assigned to them, paid by the County Educational Authority! -- Lib.Eds.)

# AGIT ~ PROP

CENTREPRISE PUBLISHING PROJECT have started on a series of books of stories and poems by and for children. They are cheap (20p) & beautifully produced. We will have more on them next issue, but enquiries and orders to CENTREPRISE, 66a Dalston Lane, London

from BOOKS AND THINGS, 6

Ferryh St, Redruth, Cornwall.  
WHISPER & SHOUT no 2 - REDRUTH DAYS. 25p. Also posterpoem no 6 (30p) & WHAT ROUGH BEAST by ALEX COMFORT (15p).

INSIDE STORY, sadly, has folded. Complete Sets are available, for £1.50 (post free anywhere in the world). The best offer you'll get this year. 13 issues came out from March '72 to Dec '73. From 3 Belmont Road London S.W.4.

OUR BODIES, OUR SELVES is a big handbook by the Boston Womens Health Collective on all a spectra of female anatomy/physiology/biology etc.etc. Its good, and if used fully, subverts the need for dependance on doctors and hospitals etc. £1.50

Leeds Free School has been going for 6 months, and needs money, equipment & labour to put the building in good shape. Arrangements for helpers to stay in Leeds c/o 23 Hartley Ave Leeds 6.

PLAY,...SCANUS Student Advisory Service are putting together a booklet on play(ing), "to question the aura of professionalism.....in suppressing peoples ability to work out ideas and do things for themselves". All ideas and experiences wanted please c/o SCANUS 3 Endsleigh St London WC1

Our cynicism toward Childrens Rights Workshop in the last Agitprop was unfortunate. We had some mail from them shortly after sending the issue off to the printers. Our apologies.



# LETTERS

From: Bill,  
Thorn Hill, Long Marston, APPLEBY,  
Westmorland

As usual 'Libertarian Education' No.12 made me, a non-anarchist, think.

In this part of the country, at any rate, and certainly amongst adults (I don't know about the children) E.S.N. schools are no longer referred to as 'silly' schools. At the best, they are thought of as special schools for those not so bright and, at worst, as schools for 'bad' lads and lasses.

I do not understand the penultimate sentence of your editorial - perhaps my fault rather than yours.

I speak from personal experience and, I would say, some personal success, when I talk about residential schools for the maladjusted. I have often said it is inadvisable to bring this type of young person altogether in one school, but what is the alternative? Often they just have to be removed from a home, a school or a community which can no longer contain them.

One of the major problems is the 'big world outside'. I think hostels, as well as the many fail-ure hostels attached (not too closely) to residential schools could act as a half-way

From: Marie Moloney,  
Carna, Co. Galway, EIRE.

I have just read Libertarian Education and can't wait for the next copy. I receive another paper on education regularly and didn't understand until now why I was never over-enthusiastic about reading it. I have been teaching for six months and looking back on it I see that even though my approach was basically liberal I was yet guilty of great atrocities - setting myself up as an authority, or rather allowing the kids to do so, because it is what they always did and believed they were expected to do. I am in the process of writing to the head (a man) of the school I spent five years in. On reading through your magazine old memories came rushing to the surface and in a fury I sat down and wrote. I am young and before I can achieve anything I realise that I will have first to be accepted as a person of some integrity. I am tired of waiting and thinking - I want to do something. At the moment I have a kid to look after and I have decided to take a year off. It is nice here by the sea. I could ramble on forever. I am interested in and want to become committed to your cause. I have friends engaged in various 'subversive' activities but have met nobody yet who is doing constructive (destructive!) work in the field of education.....

## Member NEILL

(Neill Association and Trust)

The inaugural meeting of this new association was held on 16th January, 1974. Its aims seem quite laudable. Using Neill's name the organisers are trying to obtain money for a trust which, among other things, "seeks to provide help and advice, legal and other, training and finance to individuals, to groups and to organisations whose work and aims seek to foster freedom for children....Examples of the ventures that might qualify for support by the Trust are Free Schools; communes set up with the aim of securing wider freedom and contacts with other children and adults in the context of a community; playgroups; adventure playgrounds not funded by local authorities or other existing organisation; social centres combining help for parents and children to realise their full rights as citizens."

Can the Association achieve any of this? John Daniels, one of the organisers, was talking in terms of the Trust getting hold of £250,000. However, as a first step, the organisers wish to acquire Kirkby House near Nottingham as a headquarters and sort of A.S.Neill centre where, "the ideas of Neill will be practised and demonstrated in action." Kirkby House will cost £40,000 to buy before being adapted to become a demonstration centre for Neill's ideas.

The principal organisers are: John Daniels; Michael Duane; and Gerry Blood. Membership of the association is open to everyone and costs 50p. The suggestion that membership should be cheaper for school students will be discussed at a future meeting. If you want to join, donate, or find out more, contact:

John Daniels,  
School of Education, University of Nottingham,  
University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD.

I hope the Association and Trust really does something to "foster freedom for children."

**Michael GERARD**

## Libertarian Education 14

Produced by: LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION GROUP,  
180 Melbourne Road, Leicester.  
Tel. 0533 - 50272

The magazine is available at the following rates:

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# exams

## 20 poly students in self-direction test

1 It is wrong to assume that children only work with the carrot of success and threat of failure as incentives.

2 It is wrong to assume that those who "fail" lack intelligence or determination.

MILITANT students who sabotaged an exam by organising cheating university authorities to scrap it altogether. York University announced yesterday that it has decided to abolish the first part of the social science degree. Thirty-eight students accused of cheating in December are not to be disciplined. They will resit the papers in March. But the papers in Part Two of the degree will be allowed to go on without an exam, provided they turn in satisfactory essays in the first four terms of their course. Last term, the economics department in support of their demand for the exam to be scrapped, forcing staff to abandon the exam, even for those who wanted to sit it. Instead, a special part was set during the Christmas holidays, but was too busy because of cheating. A spokesman said: "Our students are not to be treated as a special case."

## College 'cheats' win big change in exam rules

Fluke plays a great part in all exams

By MAX WILKINSON  
Education Correspondent

social sciences board of student studies said: "The process of activism may have accelerated, but it was going on anyway. However, I don't think we would have made the change so quickly if it had not been for student review."

## Exams essential to measure ability—head

BOYS should be given the opportunity to measure their ability through examinations, Mr. S. I. Hopkins, headmaster of Lancaster Boys' School, Leicester, told parents, teachers and pupils at the school's annual speech day at De Montfort Hall last night.

Mr. Hopkins said the school believed in the discipline of hard work. "In spite of the publicity given to contrary theories, we believe in examinations, internal and external.

"We believe that a boy should be given the opportunity to measure his ability, his skills and his knowledge against other boys in his year and against other boys in the country.

"He wants to know, his parents want to know and his employers want to know where he stands in relation to his peers. We as teachers want to know whether we are getting essential knowledge across to our boys.

"And, in any case, boys love competition. Isn't all life after school competitive? It is no use living in a 'cloud cuckoo' land trying to wipe out at one

tangible incentive would there be. I cannot for one moment believe that we were ever meant to be all on one level."

Mr. Hopkins thanked staff of the City Education Department for what they had done for the school and for education in the City.

He spoke of academic sporting achievements.

"We do have our levels, but at the end of the day we are all with all. But we are not to be treated as a special case."

## Exam pressure brings children to despair

were pre-... Pickering, the Inspector of Schools.

## Young rebels who try for nought out of 10

Working-class children hit back at boring authoritarian teachers by turning failure at school into a status symbol, according to Mrs. Rosie Rosenberg, general secretary of the Hackney Teachers' Association, which recently published a booklet on the subject.

"It was only after I left school that I realized that some of the boys who had failed to contact me either by letter or by phone were really cared for. One of our secondhand books was used by them."

### Privilege

Forty-four out of every 100 youngsters — about 271,000 — this summer — left school without even trying an exam. A further 109,000 (17 per cent) failed those they did take.

Defending the exam system, Dr. Rhodes Boyson, head of a London comprehensive school, says: "Exams offer opportunity to all — irrespective of background and school."

"If they were abolished the bright boy in the deprived school would be further handi-