

# editorial

Lib Ed offers no potential strategies for over-coming core inequalities, and has little to offer teachers with an active critical commitment to politics.

So ran Maureen Clark's view of this magazine in *Screen Education* 30. We replied at length to this and her other criticisms in the editorial to *Lib Ed* 29, including our admission that 'though we have discussed ways in which teachers can oppose the racism, sexism and class nature of the dominant ideology, we could and should do more in this area.' We also, incidentally, requested readers' comments on the criticisms and our reply – the response was totally underwhelming.

Nothing daunted, we intend to devote a major part of issue 31 to a symposium on the possibilities for radical activity in state schools. And we need your help. Many of our readers, perhaps a majority, are teacher within the maintained system, and we want you to contribute to our collection of articles your ideas on how, or if, work with state schools by radical

libertarian teachers can contribute to a 'consciencization' process, leaving the students (and the teachers?) more critically aware.

Can teachers counter the race, sex, class bias inherent in our society without themselves becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution? How can we best resist the pressures to conformity on ourselves as well as our students? Is changing the content of schooling, the replacement of racist and sexist textbooks, curriculum and examination reform worth attempting, or is this merely changing the facade, tinkering with the system?

Libertarian teachers have been accused of withdrawing from the struggle, being content with the attempt to create islands of sanity in the mad world of the school, a little Summerhill in each classroom. Is this true, or is it the defensive reaction of those avowedly socialist teachers who refuse to recognise the connection between their political activity and their

*continued on page 15*

## Lib Ed

Contact us at:  
6 Beaconsfield Road,  
Leicester, England,  
Tel. (0533) 552085



# LIBERTARIAN OR LIBERAL?

Whilst there is a great need to distinguish between liberal education and libertarian education, any attempt to do so inevitably represents a personal view. But nonetheless there are important differences which I believe are generally agreed upon. These differences are great and many, and may require a fuller treatment than is given in the present piece. But I present the following as a brief introductory statement for initial clarification or discussion, assuming no previous knowledge of the various authors and commentators on the subject. (This piece has been written in response to a reader's inquiry. It should not be read as a blueprint for libertarian education, or as a critique of liberal education.)

The distinction between the liberal view of education and the libertarian view necessarily arises from, and reflects, the distinction between liberal and libertarian politics. (The same is true for other areas of life inevitably affected by politics, such as development, economics, community relationships and social organization.)

The liberal view is characterized by a general attitude that is less than prepared to critically question the structural bases of the existing social system. Any serious attempt to do so is often seen as unnecessary, irrelevant, or sometimes even irreverent. This attitude is partly affected by such tardy elements as apathy, fatalism and self-seeking contentedness. The reason for this seems obvious enough: liberals tend to come from the comfortable if-not-quite-contented middle-class, who do see the need for change, but only in terms of minor changes made piecemeal; fundamental changes are seen as unproductive, or counter-productive, and indeed often a threat to their own self-interests. The liberal, even when assertive, is a reformist, not a revolutionary.

The libertarian view is altogether a more holistic and integrated one in that it sees all areas of social activity as being linked by the unifying agency of politics. It therefore strives to critically question, analyse and recommend or castigate the existing social order, and its many pillars of support such as the prevailing form of education, from a

politically impartial but committed position free from party ideology. A central concern is the profound transformation of society for greater equity for all, and this is seen as possible only with the demise of domination and exploitation. People can only be (re)humanized if the society in which they live and interact is genuinely free. The libertarian perspective thus involves fundamental social change, and not (merely) *ad hoc* cosmetic changes; its basic aims are both equalitarianism and egalitarianism.\* The libertarian is consistently active in one or more of the many social spheres requiring economic, societal and political liberation (from chauvinism, discrimination, domination and exploitation), and is by definition a revolutionary, not a reformist.

The liberal is in effect one who takes the existing social system as given, because s/he cannot, or will not, visualize a better alternative. The social concern of the liberal is therefore left to finding ways of improving societal provisions within the confines of the existing system. The libertarian by great contrast is one who, after identifying the many drawbacks of the status quo, is able and/or willing to propose and work for better, more equitable alternatives through structural change. The existing system is not necessarily infallible or immutable simply because it is there; genuine, lasting and profoundly meaningful gains can only be realized by improvements in structure - a change *of* the system, not of changes *within* the system.

## TWO WORLDS OF EDUCATION

And so it is, too, with the conception and aims of education.

The liberal view of education is concerned with making teachers more effective as teachers, and pupils more proficient as pupils. One is to be made more persuasive, whilst the other is to be made more receptive. Consequently, the teacher is expected to be more productive, and the pupil more reproductive. Such a view of education is also concerned with making the school a happier place to be in for all. Ways and means are to be found, and applied, to make the teacher's job less of a trial, teaching more effective, and the pupil's

position more appealing and pacifying. Research and debate on educational practices tend to focus on such prosaic matters as student-staff ratio, viable teacher-pupil 'relationships', the feasibility of open-plan classrooms, to stream or not to stream, to have or not to have uniforms, attention span, how to integrate remedial classes, the latent potential of Parent-Teacher Associations, and whether schooling is to be done in the classroom or at home. The examination system is seen as a convenient and fair (though not the sole) means of grading, to which the continuous assessment approach is interpreted as a radical, and often positive, alternative or supplement. In higher education, liberals see their task as consisting of such efforts as reverse/positive discrimination ('affirmative action') in favour of minorities and the dispossessed, including Black Studies in the curriculum, encouraging mature (sic) students to rejoin the academic fold by taking a degree, or at least attend an in-service course, and admitting women to traditionally male domains (colleges, classes, schemes, or as Oxford University cospersons).

Education is (implicitly if not explicitly) greatly identified with schooling. Just as a sound sexual reproductive system is an indicator of successful parenthood, a sound intellectual reproductive system is an indicator of a successful and responsible position in society. School certificates are consensually accepted as passports to a higher level in the existing social hierarchy. Often enough, competition is to be encouraged, both within and between classes, in order to fulfill the aims of individual advancement. Such an ethos, it is argued, at least prepares the child for the competitive big bad world in 'later life'. These values are embodied in the practice of competitive examination grading within the curriculum, furthered through a self-centred mode of study trans-

---

\**Equalitarianism* refers to the traditional right-wing rhetoric of 'equality of opportunity' for production, and *egalitarianism* refers to the traditional left-wing rhetoric of 'equality of distribution' for consumption. The libertarian sees both as complementary, and equally important and necessary.

ending the curriculum, and take on the sugar-coating of competitive sports and games as extra-curricular activities. And when the whole set-up does not benefit certain children, school is seen as being at least one way of keeping the kids off the streets. The liberal teacher will no doubt see that pupils are kept as happy (and pleasantly occupied) as possible while they are held there. To counter the problems of both unemployment and juvenile delinquency, extension of the school-leaving age is seen as an attractive option.

In the libertarian tradition, education is seen not as a fixed and formal stage in life through which the child has to be processed in order to be licensed for life, but rather as the valuable, lifelong activity of learning through the growing person's experiences and perception of day-to-day objects and events in the world. This means that education, and learning, have to transcend the official licensing ritual of schooling. When a curriculum sets out to say what needs to be learned within a certain period, it unwittingly also says that all other things need not be learned, at least for that period. Through concentration and specialization on a few topics, all else is excluded. The libertarian conception of education implicitly recognizes that there is altogether too much available information in the world for even a significant portion of it to be stored in any single human brain. Genuine education therefore cannot mean the transference of knowledge to the learner's memory. When education is defined as the cultivation of sensibilities, and training as the inculcation of specific skills for jobs (and the requisite ideology for such employment), the libertarian sees schooling as veering off towards the latter. (This results not so much in an achievement of the aims of training, but rather in a defeat of the aims of education.) Yet schooling alone cannot provide a skilled workforce in any vocation or profession. The form of educa-

tion provided by schooling struggles to afford an appreciable number of 'useful' subjects, as well as deal with each of the subjects in 'sufficient' depth. It thus predictably falls between the two stools of quantity and quality, achieving nothing positive worthy of note.

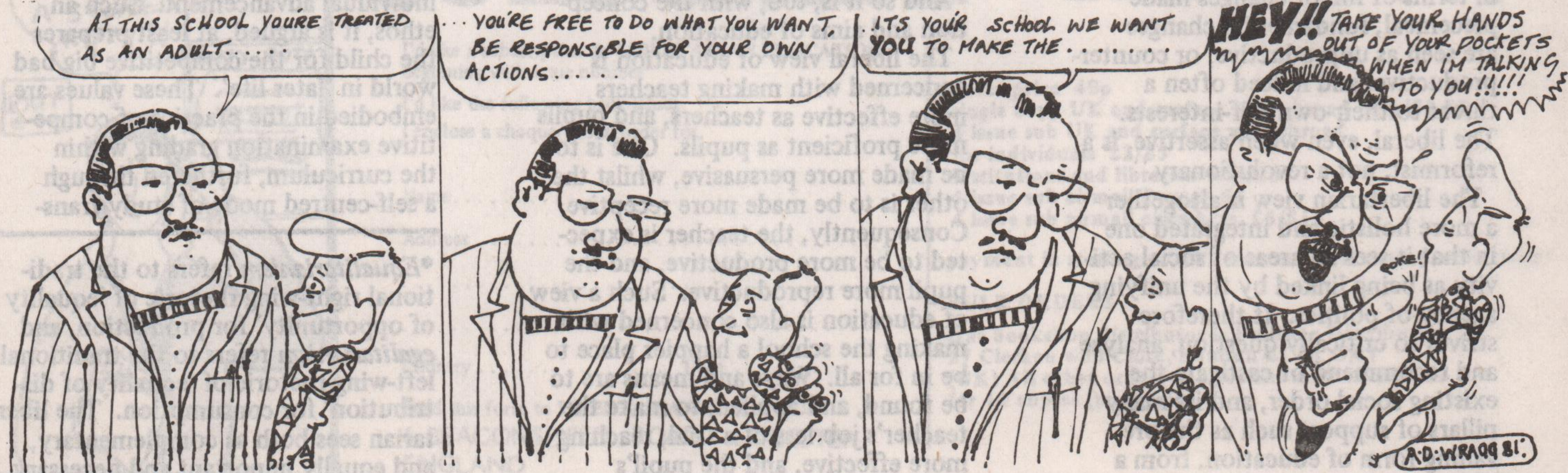
The libertarian approach to education thus strives to distance the activity of learning from the institution of schooling. In fact, schooling comes to negate learning - through the many demands made by a necessarily narrow curriculum, much of what exists or is happening in the world is systematically excluded from the child's educational compass in her/his formative years. What there is that remains to be 'learned' in a formal setting are dissected bits of reality often prepared and served up in the artificial confines of the classroom. Such an education, at the best of times, is depicted as a necessary chore and duty, for which the child is expected to be thankful. Information absorption and stylistic replication (called learning) are largely based on rote, through the process of memory recall and parroting, rather than from any real, direct development or unfolding of intellectual capacity.

#### REPRODUCING SHADOWS OF REALITY, OR LIBERATION?

Creative, intelligent, innovative and sensitive pupils often do badly at school, leading to stigmatization, a false sense of inferiority and a self-devaluation of personal worth and potential. School 'education' further reinforces and rigidifies the polarizing roles of teacher and pupil. While conservative education tries to enhance the authority of the teacher so that the pupil can be rendered more psychically malleable and hence more receptive to parcels of teaching (being 'told about things'), liberal education tries to make teacher-student relationships more hospitable, the learning environment more comfortable, and the curriculum more 'relevant' and 'enjoyable'. Libertarian education is concerned with learning, not teach-

ing, and is about coming to realize and critically assess the existential being of the world, not training under a curriculum. Even the best curriculum in the world is no more than a map of reality, and, as Korzybski put it, "the map is not the territory." Libertarian education aims to explore the terrain, whilst liberal education remains mystified with the authenticity of cartography.

Schooling also gives the false impression that those who have endured longer periods of it are necessarily better off, or at least more knowledgeable. The fact that the teacher is always the one with the largest dose of schooling in a classroom setting further reinforces her/his authoritarian position. The virtue (?) of endurance and survival under the academic regime becomes automatically translated into the virtue of (a supposed) wisdom. This fallacy, among other things, signals a paralysis of the learning environment by generally assuming that a pupil's opinion - where it is allowed, or perhaps even encouraged - is of lesser value than the teacher's. It also presupposes that because the teacher is older (ageism) and more extensively schooled (elitism), s/he would know more about the subject in question even if certain of the pupils might be able (where allowed) to come up with better, fresher insights into it - whether or not they have had prior knowledge of it before the lesson. The liberal hopes to justify the status of the teacher by making her/him ever more knowledgeable, and to devise ways of making the pupil ever more appreciative of it. A happy respect for the authority of the teacher, especially when it is justified, is seen as a healthy prerequisite to a hearty education. The libertarian instead seeks to establish profoundly humanizing relationships everywhere through which learning may be permitted to flourish in everyone. This aim cannot afford to make the same assumptions or begin from the same premises that both conservatives and liberals share; assumptions and premises which conservatives propound expli-



citly, and which liberals accept implicitly. The liberal conception of education also leaves an institution such as the school at liberty to consolidate its dominant ideology of being the necessary market for thought, ideas, intelligence, wisdom, life-skills, maturity and legitimate adulthood. Liberals would seek to make the shopping more convenient and the prices lower, but libertarians are concerned with reversing this trend of bourgeois tradesmanship in expropriating and commercializing knowledge and learning, and returning them to the life of the community (the "vernacular domain": Illich). The libertarian perspective involves deinstitutionalizing knowledge and learning (deschooling), not devising further institutional arrangements to deliver thought and ideas more conveniently to the front door. The liberal approach more deeply reinforces the hegemony of the knowledge institutions over the life of the individual and that of the community as a whole. This is done more subtly and therefore more insidiously than can usually be achieved from the more apparent conservative position. The libertarian approach by contrast seeks to liberate learning from reified institutions, dismantling dinosaur structures that are necessarily increasingly exclusive, elitist, (and therefore) alienated and alienating. These ossified and ossifying structures are also to a great extent constricting and self-defeating. The libertarian further sees the liberal approach as encouraging two general malpractices: at one end of the teacher-learner 'spectrum' (a polarizing relationship itself also encouraged by the liberal), the pupil is relatively devalued and dehumanized simply because s/he has endured fewer hours of schooling; at the other end, an overriding, misplaced trust is supposed to be accorded the teacher simply because s/he has survived (?) more hours of this institutional conformism. The libertarian thus identifies the demystification of the knowledge industry as a key to the demystification of the many and varied forms of societal superstition that both support, and are supported by, the commodity and spectacle (Marxists read base and superstructure) of an elitist society.

### TO SCHOOL OR TO EDUCATE?

The mode of education prescribed by conservatives, liberals and many on the left is what Freire describes as the "banking concept" of education. Pupils are account holders whose brains are safe-deposit boxes in which the teacher places regular consignments of knowledge; the dominant ideology of society then draws a continuing interest from the

whole enterprise. Such a society then justifies these relationships by citing the massive investments made in providing for the capital and operating costs of the banking system. The pupil is seen and treated as the passive recipient of predigested thought, an empty vessel waiting to be filled with facts, figures, ideas, and implications from those in authority at the time. Freire sees this form of learning as essentially 'necrophilic', as it only breeds a morbid fascination for feeding off a fattened corpus of desiccated information. And because it is an intrinsically prescriptive pedagogy, the pupil gets more (or less) than even 'cleanly' objective information: s/he is either overtly or covertly instilled with the value system of the dominant ideology, swallowed whole or in parts, shrouded in a seemingly disinterested curriculum and its underlying academic rituals. The task of the libertarian educationist is to rescue the pupil from such a predicament, regardless of the form of ideology being practised or likely to be practised in the future. (The currency may change according to sociopolitical ideology, but the banking system with its defects and dangers remains.) Because the liberal by stark contrast is no more than a watered-down (the original Wet?) version of ruling officialdom's representative, s/he has to lie back and accept the fundamental principles (if not their manifestations) professed by the ruling ideology, rather than, as the libertarian does, rise up to challenge them.

In the context of Freire's banking concept, Illich describes docile students as "knowledge consumers" and "knowledge capitalists". Knowledge increasingly becomes the prime commodity in the dominant service industry of teaching, wherein the few who have come to acquire higher levels of it stand to profit further by capitalizing on their gains, in acquiring better societal access through which to put themselves and their ideas across more effectively to others. Given the banking concept, the liberal proceeds to encourage the opening of more branches to serve local communities, improve credit facilities, invite more depositors, establish better terms for investors, clients and account holders generally, and above all ensure the safe-keeping of deposits and insure them heavily against loss. Within the banking system, the libertarian proposes to redefine entirely the terms of trade, being also attracted to more immediate if piecemeal solutions: the cooperative approach (eg. free schools) is appealing, and the idea of 'robbing a bank' to give to the poor is as enchanting as ever. The liberal approach of making what is essen-

tially elitist more accessible (and therefore more acceptable) to more people defeats the efficacy of the elitist principle on which it is based, while at the same time subverting (by seeming to appease and thus corrupt) counter-elitist sentiment and measures. This approach stems from, and remains rooted to, an ideological middle-ground that fails to advance and succeed in either one direction or the other. To consolidate its position it can but become more enmeshed in this double bind. It is distinctly equalitarian without being egalitarian, recommending more of the same (uncongenial relationships) but within more congenial surroundings. The liberal educationist has little argument with the Gradgrind tradition of education so long as school-leavers emerge polished and gladly ground.

Much of what has been discussed may already be familiar to *Lib Ed* readers. But it is vital to distinguish between the liberal and the libertarian positions, for the benefit of both (and other) sides. A weakness, perhaps, of many libertarians is an ability to fully appreciate their own position, and even defend and justify it, but which precludes the ability to define and articulate it to others. So there are areas that remain unclear, of which the issue of home education as an alternative to school education is a good example.

### THE THREAT OF SCHOOLING: AT HOME OR IN CLASS

The libertarian resistance to a school education centres on the authoritarian relationships inherent in such a system, whatever its current guise. The hierarchy of the western model was influenced largely by the hierarchy of the church, deriving from a time when the possessor-purveyors of learning were very closely identified with the possessor-purveyors of spiritual salvation. (The organization of the school has also been much influenced by the organization of the army and the state.) Living conditions have been transformed so radically that - even if one could justify such relationships in the past - for education and learning to progress today, teacher and pupil clearly cannot continue to "go on meeting like this." These relationships are central to the many defects of the schooling system, some of which have already been discussed. As a result many free-thinking people (not necessarily libertarians) are drawn favourably to home education for children. This can be a libertarian alternative, *but is not necessarily so*. The objections which libertarians pose to schooling are based on their objections to fundamentally

doctrinaire principles and authoritarian relationships and practices, and the myth of the neatly and diametrically opposed roles of teacher and learner. Such principles, practices, roles and relationships ("anti-life" values: Neill) are exemplified in, but not exclusive to, the school system. Many home relationships are just as bad, or worse. Some pupils look upon school as an escape from the 'pressures' at home, yet while at school yearn to leave it as well. (Hence the appeal of a genuine alternative like truancy.)

The promise and possibilities of free schools have also been hampered by their being treated as 'sin bins' for 'problem' children by conventional schooling. So if home education is to be any alternative to schooling, at least four basic considerations have to be met. Firstly, productive or "pro-life" relationships need to be engendered and promoted at home, and no ageist presumptions or authoritarianism should be entertained. Secondly, the child's natural desire to explore and learn should be encouraged, perhaps even provoked and so brought into play, but not hampered by any adult devices such as a curriculum, however muted or hidden. The parent-as-teacher is no more bountiful than the teacher-as-parent, and the offspring-as-pupil is no more liberated than the pupil-as-offspring. (Remember that the meaning of the term *Alma Mater* itself is derived from maternal connotations.) Thirdly, as the aims of libertarian education are concerned with working towards fundamental structural change in existing society, it is necessary to conceive of the objectives of and manoeuvres for change from first principles politically. The aim is not to make occasional repairs to the ailing body of the prevailing polity, but to trade it in for a new social order. This leads to, fourthly, a strongly critical and dialectical approach to perception and analysis; it is a matter of cultivating a necessary style of approach, not of instilling people with new ideas and information through the old approach. So the spectre of the school is not in the building or the grounds, or even the members of staff, necessarily; it is internalized in dehumanized relationships, which are both limiting and diversionary.

## A 'LIBERAL EDUCATION'

A liberal education, as an orientation of the higher education curriculum distinct from (the) liberal (conception of) education, is a good example of the surface reforms which educational liberalism is pushing for. A liberal education is often loosely known in the US as a 'liberal arts programme/education'. It generally contains a hotch-potch of subjects, with large helpings of the social sciences or 'broad arts' (in 19th Century Britain this used to be mathematics as opposed to theology), apparently designed by and for the middle-class caucasian. The mix is meant to provide a 'balance', whatever that might be, in the student's intellectual and academic diet. It is perhaps best construed as the status quo's massive programme for orientating impressionable young people to integrate themselves more agreeably into the status quo. This liberal initiative is objected to by both conservatives and radicals, on both sides of the political spectrum, and also by those libertarians who may not otherwise identify with any of their views. Those on the right see the trend as a dangerous erosion of academic 'standards', and a serious threat of backsliding into subversive socialism, communism, or whatever label happens to be handy. Those on the left, including libertarians, see it as a pointless diversion and a costly administrative-academic exercise in sublimation and assimilation. It ignores the real issues and keeps the major problems better disguised and concealed than ever before, instead of identifying, addressing and trying to solve them. Liberals would agree with libertarians in seeing a liberal education as a major prop, albeit a more agreeable prop, to an exploitative status quo. Liberals would part company with libertarians in taking a liberal education as desirable in itself, and as a genuine alternative to, say, conservative culture training. A liberal education is thus administered, but humanely, to patch up profoundly conservative values, whilst libertarian education seeks to revive learning and save it from these very values.

To take an analogy from capitalist industry in speaking of knowledge as a commodity, conservative education

aims at increasing output and profits in the manufacturing sector, liberal education tries to do the same but in the service sector (both encouraging such a commodity fetishism), whilst libertarian education seeks to organize worker cooperatives and de-alienate labour in all sectors. There is also a drive to promote greater self-sufficiency and even subsistence activity. The libertarian is concerned with not only the system of distribution of cultural capital (Bourdieu), but also its mode(s) of production and consumption, and also the forms of it as are available.

Yet with all the differences between liberal education and libertarian education, grey areas of doubt remain. This is due as much to a lack of discussion on the dichotomy as it is on the action of both the more 'radical' liberals and the more 'transitional' libertarians. The former are attracted to more fundamental change, and the latter to some degree of compromise. Both may meet at places or even overlap. Possibly the best example of such a meeting point is the issue of free schools. Liberals tend to view it favourably and say free schools are well-intentioned but idealistic and impractical, perhaps even ultimately subversive; yet there will be liberals prepared to support them all the way and work in them. Libertarians will maintain that any form of school, however structured, only propagates the false need for and importance of school; that free schools could more than anything else reinforce this myth by making the defects of the school system less obvious; free schools could also be absorbed into the school system proper (assimilation) to do no more than reach parts of certain 'difficult' pupils which other schools do not reach. Yet many libertarians work within such institutions in order to effect meaningful change where possible, as at least some alternative to otherwise doing nothing at all. Then there are those with a militant liberal tendency who would advocate a reconstituted school carrying a mixture of a minimum of curriculum with the functions of a "skill centre" (Ken Smith), somewhat like a runaway Marxist/monetarist in Keynesian guise, hankering after a mixed economy in all its mutant manifestations. Liberals often also try to improve methods of learning (eg. with resource-based approaches) in school, ultimately only consolidating the monopolistic role of school (see the limited proposals advanced by educationists like L.C. Taylor and Jerome Bruner). Some radical liberals would even advocate deschooling, but only for some and not others. This attitude also reveals the liberal belief that some education policies may be radically transformed but not society, and the assumption that society is necessarily divided,



and that school should be made to serve these divisions. Another grey area is fostered by the fluidity of ideological positions: for example, a person may be a full-blooded libertarian on the subject of education (or equally on any other subject or subjects), yet insist on being no more than a liberal on everything else. This arbitrary quality in what are ultimately personal opinions may seem to reflect a basic inconsistency to dogmatists, but both liberals and libertarians are not particularly disposed to hard ideology anyway. However, since libertarians do tend to be more firmly ensconced in their convictions than are liberals, it is generally safe to say that one really becomes a libertarian only when one takes a libertarian stand on all issues concerning life and living. Nonetheless, a *libertarian conception* of education is not necessarily a view held by bona fide libertarians alone.

### THE DIFFERENCES ARE REAL

But even accepting the grey areas, the differences between liberal education and libertarian education ultimately remain distinct enough. These differences are based not merely on the degree to which changes are sought,

but also on the *type* of change that is sought.

Where liberal education is a matter of flexible processing, libertarian education is the task of inciting the growth of awareness and nimbleness of thought, requiring deprocessing. Where liberal education tries to produce more liberal educationists and the liberalistically educated, libertarian education encourages a fair and sustained critical analysis, charged with a healthy underlying scepticism. And where liberal education results in the tacit acceptance and defence of established values, libertarian education strives to continually challenge these values to defend themselves, supporting or subverting them as they properly deserve. So while liberal education sees the need to be civilized as the broad-based need to become more middle-class, libertarian education sees the freedom to be human as necessarily lying with the liberation of society from class. The liberal wants to make concessions to the dispossessed; the libertarian wants the dispossessed to make ascensions. Liberal education makes bourgeois society more bearable; libertarian education makes the need and urgency for revolutionizing such a society more understandable.

Libertarians criticize and liberals concede that schooling is both a prime agent of cultural reproduction and a product of that reproduction. Liberals would wish to consolidate this role of the school in (mis)education because they think it inevitable, or that it serves and preserves their interests, or (usually) both. Libertarians would go further and see the school as an agent of social stratification and legitimation as well. In true libertarian tradition, they seek to reinstate learning, along with all other spheres of human intercourse, to their proper domain of re-humanized relationships. And this, they insist, can only be achieved by revolutionizing the pedagogy of dominance and submission institutionalized in relationships, on the field, in the factory and at the workshop, and equally in the home.

Bunn Nagara

*Send a stamped S.A.E. for a recommended list of further reading material. Please indicate your specific area(s) of interest within this broad subject, as the available literature is too vast for such a list to be indiscriminately composed.*

## Review

**L'Education Liberaire**  
Raynaud and Ambaues  
Spartacus, pp.126, 16.50 francs

This book is divided into two parts: the first an extended essay on education and the class struggle, the second a brief history of anarchism and education in Western Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century.

The first part argues against socialists who conceive of a class struggle only in economic terms - educational radicalism and the liberation of the child are vital parts of any libertarian struggle. Short appendices document parallel schools in Britain, the children's republic of Bonaposta and Vera Schmidt's brief experiment in Moscow in 1921. Most of the ideas and information in this section will not be new to readers of **Lib Ed**.

The second essay does break new ground: it examines the tradition of libertarian radicalism and education theory from Max Stirner to Francisco Ferrer. Ferrer has become renown as the theorist of the Modern School. Following his execution and the wave of international protest it provoked, Modern Schools were started throughout Spain (over 100) and in Lausanne, Brussels and New Jersey.

However, in many ways Ferrer was not an innovator, but a propagandist of work completed in France. **L'Education Liberaire** reviews Stirner, Proudhon and Bakunin on education and the work of the French libertarian pedagogues Paul Robin and Sebastien Faure. The concept of *l'education integrale* (comprehensive education) was the key to their education theory. They saw bourgeois education as separating children into thinkers and manual workers; as narrowing peoples' capabilities, not widening them. *L'education integrale* would end these barriers by giving everyone physical, manual and intellectual training.

One of the faults of this book is its uncritical appreciation of libertarian theory. *Education integrale* can be criticised for imposing a fixed curriculum of compulsory subjects on the child, for over-emphasising the worth of scientific rationalism and for under-estimating the effects of the teacher as dictator. Nonetheless, the education format proposed by the 19th century radicals was undoubtedly more liberating than the other options of a classical education, a narrow professional education (only available to a very few) or no education at all.

The three pedagogues - Robin, Faure and Ferrer - confronted the issue of the child's autonomy more directly. All three rejected all religious education, authoritarian discipline and insisted on co-education. (Robin was eventually fired during a right wing clampdown as a result of catholic complaints about co-education). They made the first steps towards the end of imposed discipline; Ferrer became famous for telling bored children "Leave us, my little ones. Don't come back until you want to."

Despite their short-comings, the work of these figures is interesting. Their intuitive feelings - e.g. the need for a warm, friendly atmosphere within the classroom, the necessity for the child's curiosity being the determining force behind any teaching - have become the basis for libertarian education. This book provides a useful summary of the work of these pioneers.

John Cobbett.

(**L'Education Liberaire** is available from la Librairie Alternatives, 51, rue St-Honore, Paris 1er.

# Reviews

**The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States**  
**Paul Avrich**  
Princeton University Press, 1980 pp.446  
£7-60

Paul Avrich is an American historian who has already written several books on the anarchist movements of the 19th century. His works are sympathetic to anarchism without taking a simple propagandist approval of all deeds committed in the name of anarchism. In his preface to **The Modern School Movement** he tells us "my approach has been largely biographical, focusing on individual men and women in actual situations". The book's strengths and weaknesses stem from this approach.

A chart on pages 48-49 gives the bare statistical outline of the book's subject matter: between 1909 and 1961 in the United States there were just over 20 schools inspired by the work of Francisco Ferrer, and another dozen or so pro-

jects in which libertarians sympathetic to Ferrer's ideas contributed (such as nurseries and adult evening classes). However only half of the 20 were day schools. The rest were sort of anarchist alternatives to Sunday Schools. Out of the ten day schools, only three or four managed to stay open for over five years - and most of these never took more than 50 children. The two most notable schools were the Ferrer Modern School at Stelton, New Jersey (1915-1953) and the Mohegan Modern School at Crompond, New York (1924-1941).

All these projects were originally co-ordinated by the Francisco Ferrer Association - a body set up in 1910 by Emma Goldman and other American radicals to commemorate Ferrer's assassination in the most productive way possible: by publicizing his work. Avrich records the links that this organization built with the political and artistic avant-garde, in America as well as Europe. The list of figures connected with the Modern

School Movement is impressive: Jack London, Anatole France, Maxim Gorky, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Man Ray, Robert Henri, George Bellows, Eugene O'Neill, Walt Whitman, Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman. Even Trotsky and John Dewey briefly attended courses and meetings held at the New York Modern School.

Avrich describes the radical consensus that formed the base for the Modern School Movement. Reformist socialists, revolutionary Marxists, anarchists and the syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or Wobblies) cooperated in a creative fusion of different political traditions. This consensus was shattered by the twin blows of the First World War and the Bolshevik takeover in revolutionary Russia. The war split patriots from internationalists; the Bolshevik takeover resulted in a long and painful split between Marxist and anarchists. Many anarchists were initially enthusiastic about Bolshevik Russia.

## VIDEO

**Street Video**  
**Graham Wade**  
Blackthorn Press £1.80

**Video with Young People**  
**Tony Dowmunt**  
Inter-Action Inprint £2.95

Two new, but quite different, books about video have recently come out:

Graham Wade, co-author with Heinz Nigg of the recent "Community Media" book (and incidentally a former member of the Lib Ed collective!) has now turned his attention exclusively to video. His new book, "Street Video", focuses attention on five radical and community video groups, recording their work and discussing their achievements. The spotlight is deliberately on groups working outside London: the Sheffield Video Workshop, the Community Video Workshop in Cardiff, Manchester Film and Video Workshop, the media workshop in Belfast, and a video project in the Glasgow estate of Castlemilk.

Community video occupies a precarious foothold in the multi-million pound video industry, clinging desperately to tiny funding budgets while all around the money floods into other uses

of the technology - video for security and surveillance, home video promotions, video for business uses, to say nothing of 'traditional' national television itself. Even the small space which radical video has carved out has been constantly under attack - Graham Wade refers to the quasi-official Arts Council attack on the movement in the mid-1970s, still remembered with anger and concern by video activists. Now, with the Tories wielding the axe up and down the country, the position seems even more under attack. As I write this review, I hear from Manchester Film and Video Workshop of cuts and staff losses in the latest round of funding cuts.

But if video is facing a renewed funding crisis, it has also had to face something of an ideological crisis. A child of the post-1968 radical tendency which stressed the importance of organising politically in the communities as well as at the place of work, community video was concerned as Graham puts it, "with building up people's awareness of what is going on around them - constructing a picture of the real world, often with a view to changing it". The question has been how in practice this can be achieved using the highly specific low-gauge video technology and a medium which, whilst different from broadcast

television, inevitably invites comparison with 'real' T.V.

One of the most interesting parts of the book for me, therefore, was the report Graham Wade gives us of the arguments and discussions within the Castlemilk Claimants' Union, precisely around the question of the value of using video. Here is John Cooper, a local union militant: "There are so many basic points that working class people have not got straightened out yet, without spending their time playing about with video. It's a bit trendy and I don't think it will help working class folk. The professionals push it... Another point that bothers me is how working class organisations get access to the equipment. It always comes through social workers or whatever..." The other side of the argument comes from another local activist: "Because video is not readily available, I don't see that as a valid argument against it... It's not the equipment in itself that's wrong. Used in the same way as community newspapers it could be effective in making people more united and aware of what is going on."

The argument must be resolved, of course, in practice, and it is the concrete efforts over the last few years to develop an effective political practice with video that this book records - the book is more of a journalistic foray and less a



The Wobblies sent delegates to a Congress of trade unions allied to the Third International, and Goldman and Berkman worked for the Bolshevik authorities from 1918 to 1921 before finally breaking with Leninism.

Left by itself, isolated in a period of growing reaction, the anarchist movement grew weaker. Avrich's account of the Ferrer School of New York in the period 1911 to 1914 describes a dynamic centre. Integral education - the teaching of both manual and intellectual skills - was instituted. All classes were voluntary, and in practice the children were reluctant to leave at all. The school was also a centre for the IWW, socialists and artists. Constant attempts were made to bring working class children into the school. There was even a touching Mills and Boon affair between a teacher and a pupil that ended, like all good romances with a long and happy marriage. The overall impression is that the school successfully put into practice many of Ferrer's principles.

After the 1914-1921 period it becomes harder to make clear judgements. How does one evaluate the work of Elizabeth

Ferm, who condemned pre-marital sex and masturbation, and who terrorized the pupils she thought guilty of such sins, and who practically banished all books from her classrooms? And yet, this woman is recorded as being kind and loving to her children. The crankiness of Elizabeth and, to a lesser extent, Alexis Ferm seem to characterize the decline of the Modern School Movement in the interwar years. Mysticism and anti-intellectualism clouded the original vigour of the movement. Some of the old links were retained: the schools were centres of activity during the Sacco-Vanzetti case and the Spanish Civil War.

The decline of the Modern School Movement prompts a number of important questions about the nature of the movement. But Avrich's book, by concentrating on colourful, biographical details, tends to ignore the more analytic issues raised by the movement. Many could see the movement as a cranky diversion from the "real" struggle. Indeed, by providing the details of the movement's decline while devoting insufficient attention to the reasons for its rise and fall, the reader is almost

automatically tempted to dismiss the Modern School Movement - if it were not for its resurgence, under different names, in more recent decades.

Most Lib Ed readers will probably have their own opinions on these issues. This comprehensive and readable documentary should provide evidence from many different perspectives on the relationship between the liberation of learning and other radical movements. If you can't read the whole book, then read the first chapter by itself. It's a skilful summary of European radicals involved in education in the period 1870 to 1914, which has a cohesiveness that the rest of the book sometimes lacks. If you haven't time to read that chapter, at least have a look at photograph 21 - Alexis Ferm at the age of 88. Surely a smile that wide must say something good about the Modern School Movement.

John Cobbett

This book is available from Blackthorn Books - now at 70 High St Leicester - or try your local library.

theoretical analysis. But, by juxtaposing similar projects in different parts of the country, the book latches on to several key issues and contradictions. Not least of these is the tension between the political aims of many of the video workers and the need to sell their projects to funding bodies as being primarily of 'artistic' value. Terry Dimmick from Cardiff Video Workshop describes what happened when they first discovered the local video portapak: "We immediately recognised the uses that this little machine, locked away in the Welsh Arts Council building for most of the time, could be put to. After that we were down there almost every day saying we wanted to hire it out. The woman on the desk always asked us: "What are you going to use it for? Is it art?" We would reassure her."

But this is a problem that can't just be laughed off, and it seriously affects groups like the Manchester Film and Video Workshop, who are funded from both the community arts and film panels of their local Arts Association. Greg Dropkin, one of the workers, is asked by Graham Wade "whether he felt there was a built-in conflict between relying on arts association money for his own preferred projects - such as the Chile and immigration tapes. He says: 'I don't make any claims to be either creative or artistic. I'm sure they don't enjoy



funding me and at some point will cut me off". Well, I've some late news from Manchester - he *has* just lost his job.

Ironically, too, Graham Wade himself has suffered from the same problems. Funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation, he presented his manuscript as arranged for publication by the Foundation, only to have it returned to him just prior to the book going to the printers. Gulbenkian's solicitor had had cold feet: "The nature of (the author's) political motivation may have so coloured his support for radical video as to distort its true advantages and prospects which deserve, I am sure, more objective promotion". In other words, 'radical' video is just fine as long as it avoids 'politics'. Humf! Exterminate all liberals!

And now we must turn to "Video With Young People", Tony Dowmunt's new

handbook for Inter-Action's Community Arts series of books. It would be unfair to the author to say that this book is precisely what one would expect from the Inter-Action stable. True, it has that slightly saccarine Inter-Action flavour to it, and is also weighed down by the seemingly obligatory back-cover puff to the talents of fuhrer in chief Ed Berman. But, despite all this, Tony Dowmunt has written a very useful handbook for anyone who finds themselves using video with kids. There's a guide to how the equipment works, and a series of suggestions for games to help kids become familiarised with the equipment.

Tony Dowmunt's interest in video work is in the *process*, not the end-product. In other words, the enjoyment and discipline which use of the video medium can give to the children using it is what counts more, much more, than any concern for the value of the finished video tape.

Credit where credit is due, too, the book also displays a welcome awareness of - and an attempt to combat - sexism. There is for instance a useful chapter discussing and encouraging the idea of girls-only video projects. In short, it's an informative handbook, and will undoubtedly prove helpful for teachers and workers with children - especially those who've had their eye on video equipment tucked away in an odd cupboard somewhere but never quite been sure how to make use of it.

Andrew Bibby

# PEOPLE'S TV

An extract from 'Street Video' by Graham Wade, also reviewed in this issue.



## Introduction

Video is about communication. It is a way of recording synchronised pictures and sound on magnetic video tape. Television stations use it to record their programmes on before transmission. Community video groups up and down the country use it to record their material on. The medium is the same, but the scale of the two sets of operations is very different. So is the nature of their messages.

Television is often about entertaining people. It is highly centralised and offers few opportunities for interaction between the public and the programme makers. Essentially it supplies a passive experience to viewers — they just sit and watch it.

On the other hand, community video is about involving ordinary people in the process of making video tapes. It is highly decentralised and offers many opportunities for participation. It is not controlled by some inaccessible élite, which is why it is significant.

As power — and particularly the power of communication — becomes vested in fewer and fewer hands, so the ability of people to speak to each other about issues which concern them grows smaller. If you cannot communicate effectively then you become powerless to influence events — to organise and protest.

Community video, along with other community media such as community newspapers and community photography, is an attempt to reverse that trend. All of those media stand for genuine communication between people. Unless care and thought is given to their development most people may end up without any voice at all.

*Street Video* is about community video activity in the UK using relatively low-cost, portable video technology. It aims to give a picture of why and how small bands of people all over the country — mostly on very low incomes — have decided to use this particular medium to fight for a wide range of radical causes. Its main focus is the people who use video and the subjects they choose to make video tapes about — it is not a technical handbook.

## Sheffield Video Workshop

Essentially the video workshop in Sheffield is the creation of one person, Nick Smart. Since its establishment in the summer of 1977 he has devoted most of his time to the project, which he views largely as one of research and experiment into alternative forms of communication based on video. He openly describes his approach to video as "anarchy" and is highly critical of the way society is presently organised.

### Right-wing views

A video tape of considerable educational value, is entitled *A High Tory*. The story behind it is an interesting one. Occasionally, to supplement his income, Nick Smart undertakes video work of a distinctly non-community nature for a middleman who offers various types of broadcasting and video services, including TV interview training. He describes the work in these words: "I turn up in various college studios, sometimes with a suit on, and I pretend to be a radio or TV interviewer, or work the equipment. The clients are managers of concrete companies and area health authorities and all the rest of it."

On one such occasion Smart found himself operating the camera for a special training session in which a millionaire industrialist was being interviewed immediately prior to a real interview he was to have

at Tory Central Office, London, as a potential candidate for the Conservative Party in the European Parliamentary elections. The practice interview sessions proved to be something of an eye opener as far as the political views of this Tory industrialist were concerned.

Smart, realising the tape would appeal to a wider audience, kept the original intact and placed it in the workshop's library. Whether one agrees with how the tape was obtained or not, *A High Tory* is often highly amusing as this businessman stumbles his way through the questions posed to him. But behind the laughs lies something much more serious and sinister. The man's views take on a frightening dimension when one realises he is not just a saloon bar pedant, but is an influential industrialist who has been a Tory councillor and aspires to hold a seat in the European Parliament.

The most revealing section of the tape is worth quoting at length. In response to a question on which subjects would he wish to concentrate if he were elected, he replies:

"The other committee I would like to sit on — whatever title it goes under — is how the younger generation is going to be employed throughout Europe. . . . We've got the real problem in this country of 1½ million unemployed, and probably another one million underemployed. This is the first time in the history of Europe that there's not been a war — and I mean the history of Europe. There's not been a war to occupy young people and somehow get rid of their animal instincts.

If this was a TV broadcast on an open circuit, I wouldn't dare give you the solution I have in mind. My private solution is that we should come to an agreement with the Egyptians, and the Libyans if you like, that a part of the western desert be reserved for a permanent war. And that any one that was condemned for robbery with violence, hooliganism and so on should be sentenced to as long as the crime sort of warranted.

They could join either the reds or the blues and the permanent war would be kept going obviously with conventional weapons. I think that this would deal with the problem of hooliganism in Europe forthwith, and to some extent with the problem of unemployment. . . . You could solve the semi-skilled unemployment problem by building up the services straight away."

In terms of left-wing propaganda there are many possibilities for the hi-jacking of similar tapes made by capitalist organisations and individuals for their own internal consumption. Management training material and internal company video newsletters also provide unusually perceptive insights into how capitalism works and what its real motives are. The power of such liberated tapes and their usefulness is indicated by the prefacing remarks in *A High Tory*, when he says: "If this was a TV broadcast on an open circuit, I wouldn't dare give you the solution I have in mind."

By making these private thoughts and messages committed to video tape more accessible, the activist has a powerful educational weapon at her or his disposal. In one sense this type of activity properly and accurately deserves the often loosely used term "guerrilla video".

### Battered women

Anyone who doubts the ability of amateurs to make a video tape which is both highly watchable and informative should see *They Pretend We Don't Exist* by Cardiff Women's Aid. Shot in 1977 it has been screened to several groups of women interested in setting up refuges for battered women. At one point the BBC were going to

An extract from 'Street Video' by Graham Wade, also reviewed in this issue.

broadcast it regionally, but some of the women in the tape didn't want it shown to a general audience.

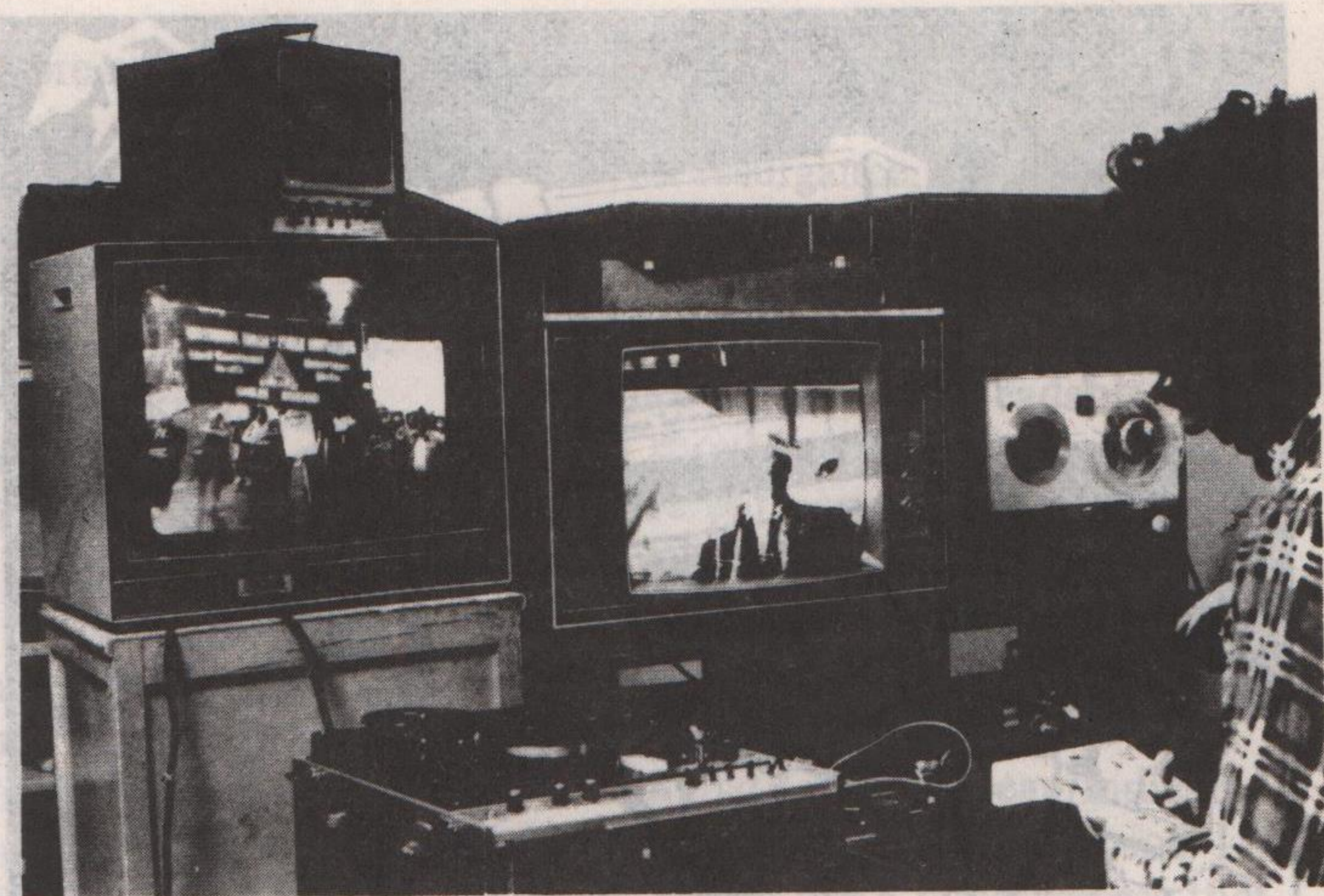
The tape provides an all-too-realistic account of the problems faced by battered women. The central element of the tape is the Cardiff refuge started by Women's Aid for women and children desperate to escape their husbands. Many of the women at the refuge explain how they've come to be there, including the misery of having to walk the streets with hungry children and being directed to bed and breakfast accommodation by social security.

One woman remembers: "This place I was sent to was supposed to be a home for the homeless, I think. . . . It was like a concentration camp. You couldn't leave in the morning unless you had an appointment with social security. Then you were allowed out before 11am. You had to report as you were going out and report when you came in."

Another tells how she felt on her first visit to the social security office after arriving at the refuge. : "It was somewhere I'd never been before. . . . I just felt out of place. There were a lot of questions they didn't need to know, that weren't relevant to why I was there. I don't think they have the right to pry into your private life. I get £22.30 a week off them. I pay rent, electricity and have to feed and clothe the little boy out of the remainder. I had no information given me at all about what I was entitled to when I went over to the social security. It was only the people in the refuge that put me right and put my mind at ease as to what I was entitled to."

The women fill in the details of their past naturally and without fuss. The most powerful aspect of the tape is the way it relates a strong sense of the women's solidarity with one another. As one remarks: "When I went to the refuge they brought me out a lot there. I think if they're determined enough they will make it on their own — they can make it on their own — because I have." She was one of those who had managed to find a home of her own having stayed in the refuge after leaving her husband.

As well as dealing with basic problems of finding a bed and obtaining social security, the tape also tackles the legal aspects of restraining violent husbands and starting divorce proceedings. All in



all, *They Pretend We Don't Exist* manages to construct a well-rounded picture of its subject — mainly because it was made from the inside. It has also proved itself to be an effective tape for raising support.

## Media Workshop Belfast

The battle-scarred streets of Belfast and all that goes with them — the heavily armed police and army patrols, the searches and the medieval-looking military fortresses — might seem an unlikely context for a band of community media workers to be active in. However, the Belfast Workshop manages to exist.

A small group interested in the potential of low-gauge video has existed in Belfast since about 1972. But it wasn't until the beginning of 1978 that it moved into its first proper home — two floors of old offices over shop premises in Lombard Street right in the centre of Belfast. Here the media workshop shares the space with a closely related group known as Art and Research Exchange (ARE).

### A Provo funeral

The potential of using the workshop's video equipment for putting across — or at least recording — a view of what is happening in Northern Ireland which is very different from that of the established media has at least been partially exploited. An example of such use is *Funeral*, a video tape recorded in the summer of 1977. It follows, without the aid of any commentary, the progress of the funeral of a young Provisional IRA volunteer.

The relatively unadorned presentation of the event through the video tape stands in stark contrast to the sort of treatment it would typically receive in a television news bulletin or documentary: a few brief shots of the uniformed paramilitaries interpreted for the audience by a partisan commentary. The tape runs for almost 30 minutes and starts by showing the children gathering outside the block of Ballymurphy council flats from which the procession will later set off.

At several points through the day the tape captures the straight news media — particularly the newspaper photographers — as they hover to snap the most dramatic aspects of the ritual. As the uniformed paramilitaries first assemble round the hearse (with the sign *Healy Belfast* advertising the undertaker in a side window), it is the moaning sound of automatic film winders in a few dozen press cameras that impresses itself on the viewer's attention.

As the cortege slowly moves past block after block of bricked up flats an old woman cries and the half-dozen or so male Provos guarding the coffin march along stiffly, but all out of step. It is a ragged urban army and the soldiers on display that day were very young indeed — some only in their early teens.

When the column halts in a terrace street for the firing party to produce its revolvers and fire three volleys of shots in honour of the dead young man, the assembled press cameras whirr even more loudly into frenzied activity. The procession moves onto a four-lane road and takes its width over entirely — no army or police personnel are to be seen. As the cemetery is reached a woman in the crowd is shown filming on a home movie camera — possibly one of the family or a friend.

An army observation helicopter is heard, but not seen, circling overhead. Someone asks: "Could you move back and leave the priest through, please?" The service is read: "Lord you are our life and resurrection," and the Lord's Prayer is chanted. A little boy of about six cries bitterly in the front row around the graveside and a woman



strokes his head. Dirt is shovelled on top of the lowered coffin.

A heap of wreaths are laid on top of the mound to the orders of a man with a megaphone — first those of the family and then those of the different battalions of the Provisionals' Belfast brigade. The oration is read by a woman: "A lad strong of will, sixteen years old — only a child in age, yet a man of heart and mind. When it came to his country he showed no fear nor backed down to any person. This is the reason the British army have cut him down in childhood." The helicopter hovers lower and she has to raise her voice to be heard above its engines. A minute's silence is observed by the assembly after which they disperse. The camera tilts upwards to show the helicopter and then pans across the cemetery as people find their way home.

It would be wrong to see *Funeral* as a pro-Provisional IRA video tape, or for that matter one that is anti. Its strength lies in its powers of quiet observation. It contains a wealth of detail which illuminates part of a complex struggle and for that reason it should be welcomed and more widely seen.

## Overview

Another tape of the same type is *Belfast October 1978*. This was made by a small group of anarchists as part of a contribution they were to make to a libertarian conference held in Manchester. Several 20-minute reels of tape were shot over a very short period and then edited down to about 45 minutes. Although there is a commentary, there is little attempt to editorialise or question people who appear in it critically. This was deliberate.

The introductory sequence gives a brief view of the streets — the Protestant Shankill, the small Catholic enclave of Unity flats, the lower Shankill — "known as the Weetabix complex", and the Catholic Falls Road. The slogans proliferate: No Pope Here, Remember the Loyalist Prisoners, RUC Thugs Out, Provos Rule the Falls, Sectarianism Kills Workers, Will Lizzy Visit H-Block? and Stonemason Will Not Break Us.

The main body of the tape is devoted to a series of interviews. The first is with a woman from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). "In my opinion," she says, "the violence has demoralised people to a great extent and has led to them not being involved to the extent they could be in political change." She refers to the Protestant workers who are increasingly suffering unemployment, which used to be largely confined to Catholics. "This is teaching the Loyalist section of the population just exactly how important they are to Britain."

Next comes an interview with a woman from Sinn Fein — the Workers' Party, more popularly known as the Official IRA or the stickies. She outlines a shift in IRA policy during the mid-1960s when Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, became more socialist. She continues: "In 1970 the Provisional, nationalist elements left. The Provisionals increasingly showed themselves to be an armed right-wing reactionary movement."

The spokesperson for Provisional Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Provisional IRA, tells the story rather differently. He says that when it became clear at the end of the 1960s that the demands of the civil rights movement could not be met, there was a difference of opinion within Sinn Fein — those who believed in countering British capitalist violence with Irish armed struggle and those who adopted a

non-violent position. The pro-violence segment became the Provos. He says they are fighting for both the military and economic withdrawal of the British to be replaced "with a genuine democratic socialist system."

The tape makers had intended interviewing a member of the Ulster Defence Association, a Loyalist paramilitary group, but their tight schedule coincided with a UDA conference which meant no one was available at that particular time.

## Torture

There follows a section where "a detainee talks to us on the day he was released." A somewhat nervous young man, face away from the camera, relates his story of being picked up under section 11 of the anti-terrorism law. He describes the bullying tactics of his questioners at the Castlereagh interrogation centre. Threats against his wife and children were made to produce a confession. He describes physical torture inflicted on him.

Then comes a sequence of a street riot, an account of feminist politics in Northern Ireland and the tape concludes with a statement from the NICRA woman. She ends by saying: "People in Britain should be aware of the consequences of ignoring Northern Ireland. It's fine to salve your conscience by being active on such issues as Chile or South Africa, but we always say you should clean up your own backyard first. . . . To ignore Northern Ireland is to nail the coffin of your own democracy."

Because of a technical problem with the copy of *Belfast October 1978* which was taken to the Manchester conference for which it was intended, on that occasion extracts from the original raw material had to be screened instead of the edited version. Nevertheless, they still made an impact. One of the tape's producers, Ernest McNab, says: "It got people a bit angrier about Northern Ireland than if the information had been related in speech." Subsequently the video



tapes remained in England for several months and were seen by different groups including the Troops Out Movement.

The original group of Belfast anarchists is now planning to update the original tape and wishes to considerably extend its video activity. At the time of my visit they were busily raising funds to make a video tape at a large syndicalist CNT conference in Spain. They believe video is the most dynamic and effective form of communication for getting across their message.

## Big Brother

The examples of radical video activity outlined in these pages are living proof that the medium and its community applications are worthwhile and deserve developing. But they are only one part of a much wider argument about the sort of society we want to live in.

In 1961, a project called Centre Fortytwo based at the Roundhouse in London was launched to promote arts for the people. It failed. But in one of its promotional documents it gave a warning, which is still relevant today. It ran: "If we do not succeed, then a vast army of highly powered commercial enterprises are going to sweep into the leisure hours of future generations and create a cultural mediocrity the result of which can only be a nation emotionally and intellectually immature, capable of enjoying nothing, creating nothing, and effecting nothing."

Radical video is part of the movement which has lined itself up against that commercial army. It deserves support. ●

# review feature

**Absent from School.**

**Beyond Control.**

**Rob Grunsell. 1980**

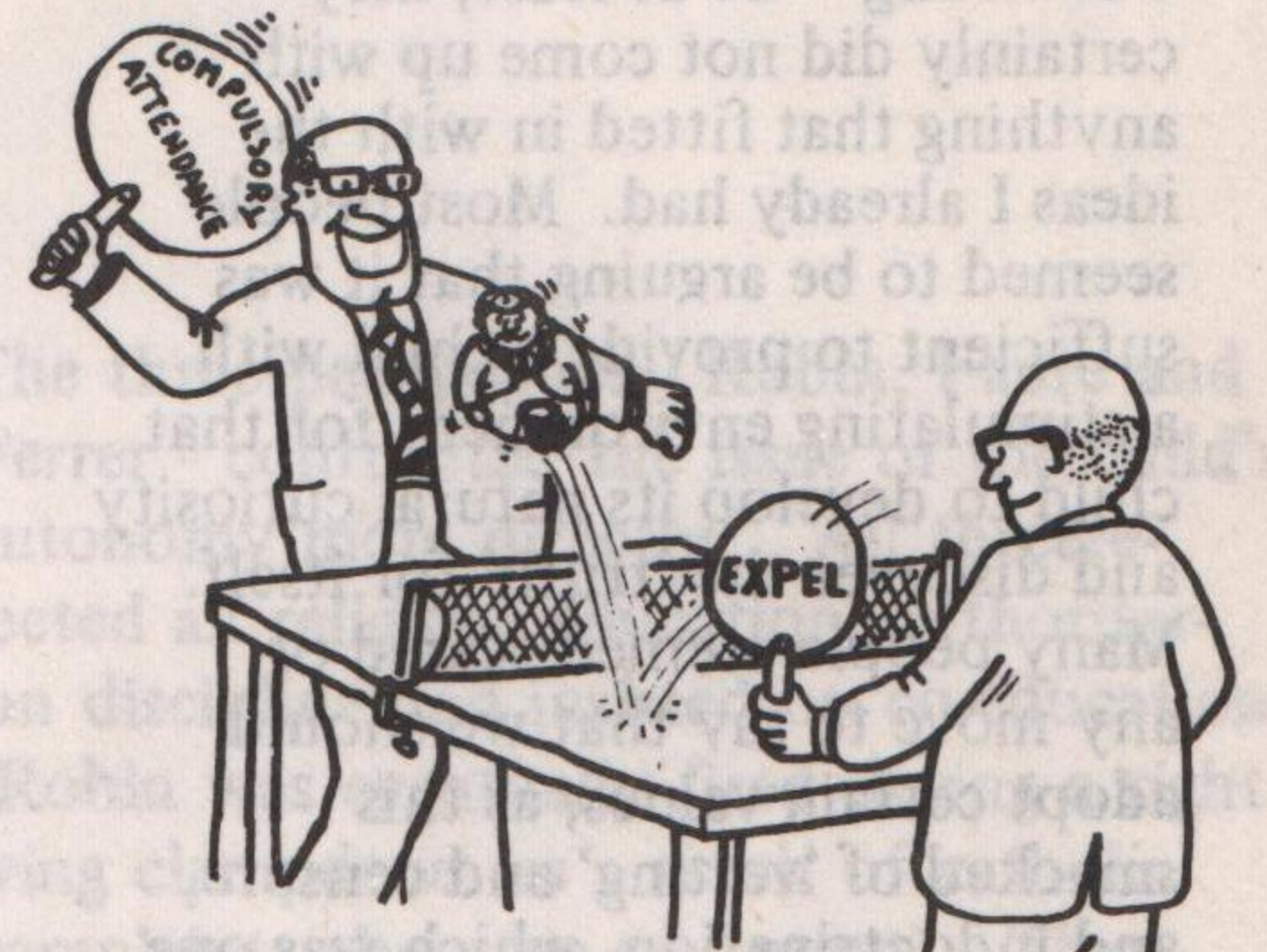
**Chameleon Books/Writers and Readers Co-Operative.**

**£1.95 each.**

Two interesting books from the Writers and Readers Co-operative, which make a bridge between social work, and the two issues of truancy and suspension, which are usually considered as being solely the concern of the education system. Both books look beyond the pure statistics of the issues involved to ask why certain school students reject, or are rejected by, the state education system. "Absent from School" deals with an "alternative school" set up by an L.E.A. in London, to deal with a group of students who had proved to be uncontrollable within the state system; whilst "Beyond Control" adopts a case study approach to a varied group of students who had been either permanently or temporarily excluded from their schools. One of the major strengths of both books is that they come from the experiences of one person actively involved with the issues concerned, whose outlook is not limited to merely assessing the educational potential of these students, but also covers their home and socio-cultural backgrounds. Both books clearly point out the paranoia of the educational establishment with regard to any criticism of its established codes of practice. "Absent from School" deals with a truancy project, of which Rob Grunsell was one of the founder members, which took habitual truants from the rolls of secondary schools in the borough of Islington in London, with the brief of 'straightening them out', and returning them 'cured' to their original schools. In practice, the students involved often ended up finishing their education at the Centre as the methodology of this unit was diametrically opposed to that of the schools from which they had come. For most of the truants this was the Centres' main attraction. Grunsell seems to have

realised early on in the project that the 'professionalism' enforced on most teachers and social workers would have to be abandoned in order not to duplicate the system which had already classed these students as failures. Personal, not professional, relationships had to be built up to remove the instinctive (and invariably justifiable) defence mechanisms of these students against groups of professionals whose chief interest was often the perpetuation of their own position of authority and sets of values. The centre was still very much a part of the state system, and, as with most projects of this type, was used as a dumping ground by the L.E.A. and the local secondary schools. In some ways, this was not without its advantages, in that, once the authorities had washed their hands of these truants, the workers at the project were allowed a good deal of autonomy as to how the place was run. The book brings out several interesting points in the truants reactions to a much more liberal regime --- their desire for "real lessons" and discipline when they had already rejected these in their schools, and their suspicions of the motives of a group of adults who consciously tried to destroy the authoritarian image the students expected from them. The fact that several of the students that passed through the centre became successful (even within the terms of the state system) is a reassuring confirmation of the fact that truancy is not merely a failure of the "client", but also a clear pointer to the inability of the state system to cope with individuals who feel that the state system is alien to their way of life and therefore has little to offer them. "Beyond Control" deals with how and why schools suspend students, and clearly points to the need to take into account more than just the behaviour which leads to suspension. It clearly points out how suspension is used to remove those who raise two fingers to authority and the status quo in

schools, but falls short somewhat in identifying the faults within the state system which leads to this situation. The case study approach provides ample evidence as to why various individuals reject the authority imposed on them in schools, but does not investigate the function of this authority or criticise the social conditioning in schools which those suspended have usually come into conflict with. Much of the book seems to be arguing for a much tighter procedure for suspension --- where each case will be reviewed by all concerned parties (except the student involved of course --- they have no rights). Certainly, within the existing system this would be a positive move, but there seems to be little questioning of, for example, why a student should want to tell a teacher to fuck off --- is it because the student concerned is naturally abusive, is it because the teacher involved is a frustrated demagogue, or is it because of the repressive system under which both operate? We all know that these factors are involved, but will the authorities recognise them?



The book does provide some useful statistics on suspensions; for example, that a sizeable proportion of suspensions are for violence against other pupils, and that many of those suspended, especially towards the end of their school careers, are not found alternative provision. I suppose that there is some justification for Grunsell's pure presentation of statistics in these cases, as to deal with all the contention raised by these issues would require something on the scale of the Encyclopedia Britannica; but I can't help but feel that some of the more obvious implications of the material presented have been omitted and that these could have provided a much keener edge for what is already valuable material for anyone working with young people, both in education and in social work.

A.T.

*continued on page 16*



# WHYLD AT BEECHWOOD

This article was originally written to circulate among people who attended the conference on alternative education at Beechwood, Leeds. It is an attempt to keep alive points which arose in discussion on the aims of alternative education in two of the workshops and the final plenary session. I was one of the main protagonists in this debate, and I apologise if, because of this, I give more weight in the article to the points I raised. I had never met people involved with alternative education before, although I had read a lot in **Lib Ed**, and other mags., am heavily involved with the analysis of sexism in education, and have recently completed an education course where I studied quite a lot of the political analysis of education. I went to the conference with the personal aim of finding out what were the latest developments in alternative education, and precisely what alternative education was all about. I assumed that most other people at the conference would be able to give me an answer quite easily. I was wrong — or at least, they certainly did not come up with anything that fitted in with the ideas I already had. Most people seemed to be arguing that it was sufficient to provide a child with a stimulating environment for that child to develop its natural curiosity and discover the 'truth' for itself. Many people seemed scared of any move to say that we should adopt certain values, as this smacked of 'vetting' and censure, and indoctrination, which was one of the main reasons for escaping the state system. As the debate progressed, and I think some of the people who had been against indoctrination accepted my stance that you had to uncover socialisation, to become aware of it, the main disagreement polarised between me, arguing the line of political awareness, and those people, who at the end of the article, I refer to as the 'growth' people. Their main stance was that I was ignoring the most

important part of education, that of nurturing the individual creativity, the life force, and that if we concentrated on this, we would be able to resist corrupting influences in society.

What is alternative education? And what are its aims? There seems to be a good deal of confusion. If alternative education is seen as any type of education outside of the state system, then this includes public schooling, and people who educate their children at home, because the local comprehensive is not sufficiently rigid and academic. This is not what most people mean by alternative education, but raises the question of how we should define it. One method would be to list categories, but this could lead to an endless list which would never be complete, because we cannot predict future developments.

Another method, the one I shall adopt, is to identify certain basic elements which seem to be common to what most people mean by alternative education. Most seem to agree that the broad aims of alternative education are to develop personal autonomy and critical awareness. The disagreement arises over how we achieve this desired state. My position is that we need certain specific objectives, which spell out the details, or act as building blocks. So, for example, although it is not the main aim of alternative education to be non-sexist, it is an essential prerequisite. In order to counteract the dominant ideology of a capitalist patriarchal society, alternative education needs to be positively non-racist, non-sexist non-classist and non-authoritarian. (A useful exercise, and one I hope will be continued after the conference is to extent this list, and discover other areas and processes of domination.)

Racism and sexism are so deeply ingrained into British culture that it is usually necessary for them to

be pointed out for us to be made aware. To counteract racism, it is not enough that a child should identify and reject the blatant ravings of the N.F. Racism is also hidden in the imperialism of British history, in the white middle class normality of children's reading materials, and in the folklore which designates black as the colour of the devil. No children brought up within the limitations of traditional sex roles can possibly be free to develop their individual desires or aptitudes. Middle-class values insidiously encourage the working-class to deny the validity of their own way of life, and to adopt middle-class trappings. Authoritarianism has been long recognised by libertarians as sapping initiative and instilling mass apathy.

However, the idea that we should 'indoctrinate' our children with any ideas, whether pro or anti-establishment, conflicts with many people's belief that alternative education should be 'unbiased', and that it should encourage freedom of choice. I would like to answer this criticism in two ways. Firstly, if a person who had received alternative education made a conscious choice to be racist, then we would have no hesitation stating that the education of that person had failed. You can argue around this point in many ways: the individual in question was obviously not critically aware — critical awareness is in contradiction to racism, which is blind hatred. You cannot avoid the fact that racism is incompatible with having a successful alternative education.

Libertarian educationalists want to encourage people to be free, and to enjoy their freedom. But the old authoritarian argument that freedom (anarchy) leads to chaos bears some truth if we do not carefully examine what we mean by freedom. Certain 'freedoms' may oppress other people, and stop them enjoying their freedom. Racism and sexism are examples of





these. (We need to examine patterns of socialisation more fully to identify other areas of oppression). What freedom does a starving worker have to refuse the only job available, although it is dangerous and low paid? Yet this is a common definition of freedom used to form the moral basis of capitalism. Regardless of freedom of choice, killing, hurting and exploiting people are wrong. We should settle down to discuss these and other moral tenets, and how they can be achieved, and not get distracted by rhetorical arguments about limiting people's freedom of choice or thought, nor lose ourselves in the tautological argument that critical awareness automatically leads to a rejection of oppression. We can agree on certain values, and use these as a basis in our teaching.

This brings me to my second argument against the criticism that it is against the ethos of alternative education to teach values (preach). Education does not happen in a vacuum; it is part of the social environment. For a start, any child educated at home or in a freeschool, will have picked up definite alternative values about education — state schools are normal, but not O.K. .... freeschooling is abnormal but they know it is O.K., whereas most other people think it is odd. In other words, by the very act of alternative education, we shall have provided messages which are learnt but not taught, (the hidden curriculum). People receive messages about normality from all walks of life, not just in school. Family, friends, books, newspapers, T.V. etc., all spread messages about normality which we internalise (accept into our consciousness). Unless we feel particularly uncomfortable about these messages or someone points out their implications, we accept them without question, and often without realising that we are getting them at all. This applies not just to the children in freeschools, but also to the adults involved in the process of education, who are transmitting their socialised behaviour patterns without necessarily realising what they are doing. Socialisation is so subtle that it takes collective intelligence of many people to identify the processes involved. A child is not a clean slate, and most are indoctrinated into the values of society from the

cradle. In order to counteract this indoctrination, to give children free choice, we have to show them precisely what these values are, and how they are perpetrated. Awareness is the first step in our liberation.

I am a Marxist in the sense that I believe that the social environment is the major influence in determining people's characters. All the same, I agree that it is not sufficient just to make people aware of how the environment shapes them. We also want to encourage people to have confidence in their own abilities, to be creative, imaginative and curious. Some people believe that children are naturally like this, until they get "contaminated" by state schooling. I do not want to dismiss the efforts and strategies of those who work closely with the people they are helping, to provide a good environment for learning. I have been helped a lot by them. People who are good at political analysis are often, like me, hopeless at encouraging young children. On the other hand, I think that the "growth" people incorporate some of their political analysis into their teaching and their personal behaviour, and that they use it to become more aware of themselves. It is pointless to argue over which is the best strategy, as if there can only be one — there is no reason why many strategies should not be complimentary. Gestalt theory says that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the way that people interact depends on the strengths and interests of the individuals concerned.

What I would like to see next year is a closer analysis of the ways in which people learn, so that we are more competent to direct and encourage development towards awareness and autonomy.

Janie Whyld.  
Sept. 1980.

## EDITORIAL continued

everyday practice? Is the trade union struggle a worthwhile sphere of activity for the radical libertarian teacher? Is there any hope for a nonsectarian alliance of left teachers? Have recent government cuts diminished the space for radical activity in schools, or have they made the contradictions clearer? Should deschoolers involve themselves in 'Save our Schools' campaigns? With our (probable) next government committed to the abolition of private schools, should we be promoting the idea of State Sponsored Alternative Schools? Or does any contact with the state hopelessly compromise our libertarian principles, leaving free schools as the only answer?

A lot of questions, and we do not expect to answer them all in the 20 pages of *Lib Ed* 31. We list them as indications of the areas we would like to cover, and to invite you to contribute your ideas to the symposium. Graphics, photographs etc are also welcome. Please send your contributions, maximum length 2000 words, before October 1. Thanks.

Apologies for the lateness of this issue, and for the quality of some of the typesetting. Both are due to our chronic financial crisis. To save money, the setting is done by a variety of inexperienced hands at Leicester Community Press, whose IBM is on the blink.

## Libertarian Socialism

★ a new, non-sectarian, Quarterly.

★ send s.a.e for details and Newsletters

**NOW!**

LCL  
1 Grove Gardens, Leeds LS6 4EG  
Tel. 780719

# LANGUAGE

**FINDING A LANGUAGE: autonomy and learning in school**

Peter Medway

Published by Chameleon Books £1.95

Medway's book describes an educational project in a comprehensive conducted by him and his colleagues with their pupils in the 14 to 16 age group. The project grew out of an attempt to reformulate and correct the 'three-fold relationship' of English, humanities and working-class pupils. It consists of developing a praxis for learning based on a positive view of what is actually the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: the hypothesis essentially states that one's understanding of the world is significantly shaped, and limited, by one's understanding of the language through which that world is expressed and experienced; the project turns this contention round to show that pupils can in fact gain more from their humanities subjects by taking the English - through which the subjects are experienced - on their own terms, and not as a subject in itself. The English is thus seen as a form of self-expression, and not - as with Queen's English - a form to be remembered and reproduced. The English is as much in the humanities as the humanities are in the English, and the pupils are as much in on the project as are the teachers who started it.

Further, the project shows that the strength of a curriculum is in its weakness - i.e., the value of a taught programme lies with the pupils discovering for themselves what it is not, rather than with their passive acceptance of what it purports to be. This is perhaps best done indirectly, even unconsciously - it is when a curriculum subject appears least demanding that it becomes a most accessible area for curriculum-based learning. One certain result of such a pedagogy is that the overt curriculum only becomes hidden; and, as such, more successful in its aims.

Yet, if given the constraint of a curriculum under which one *has* to work, the results documented here are promising enough. The author's experiences with working-class pupils shows that there is much to be gained, in both spoken and written expression, when they realize that it is after all quite relevant and legitimate to bring personal experiences into the classroom in trying to communicate. The traditional barriers between attendance in class and life in the real world are broken down, and the pupils are allowed to treat their school hours as an unobtrusive part of growing up. So the au-

tonomy and 'freelance' capability of the pupil have to be preserved - and encouraged - if learning, especially language learning, is to have any meaning for and expect commitment from the learner.

The log book mode of (written) personal communication between teacher and pupil, as used in the project, is also commendably helpful. The pupils rightly and effectively took it as a dialogical model of communication, and by giving them a greater opportunity to express themselves in a way they would not otherwise have done, it helped them to both articulate their thoughts in writing, which is good for English, and organize their account of their experiences through writing, which is good for the humanities.

Medway tries to demystify writing (as a use of language) from its alienating position of being a detached skill within the curriculum; he attempts to return writing to its rightful place as a medium of expression and communication, rather than have it remain just another intellectual facility to be mastered. This, he perceptively observes,



**Chameleon**

requires the respectful humanizing of pupils, who have to be "taken seriously as learners with some stake in the business of learning," and the form of writing taken by the new imperative "would not be dictated by the need to test them" (through mindless reproduction). Given this more fertile approach to organizing information, a more integrated body of knowledge is formed; new information which the pupil subsequently receives may then be given a more complete interpretation *in relation* to this construction. Apart from helping to provide a written record for the teacher to come to know which lines of expression-communication need to be developed most, this emphasis on a more naturalistic writing affords pupils a relaxed channel in which to be themselves. In learning the language, the orientation is towards *using* the language through the experience of the pupil, rather than *adopting* the language as used through the experience, and the experience of it, of the teacher/examiner.

In speech, Medway raises an important point when he refers to "good talkers," "'natural learners'" and similar others who "have efficient (thought) retrieval systems, cross-indexed under a very large number of headings." He observes that they "exhibit not only a rich fund of particular knowledge and ideas but also

an integrated overall outlook towards whole aspects of reality, in such a way that one feels they have come.... ....to some large conclusions about the world, which give a distinct colour to all their attitudes." This ability is perhaps the most important human intellectual capability of all (some now argue whether chimps have it as well) - the ability to grasp the Gestalt of a situation or event even as it happens, built up by a consistent habit of analysis and reflection, reinforced by the innate reflex of inquiry. However, Medway is being over-cautious when he says that this capacity "occurs spontaneously in some people" and "could possibly be promoted in school in far more people." I suspect he is only half right. Even before commencing the conscious 'promotion' of such a process, the capacity for which resides in everyone albeit to different degrees, the prevalent rote system of teaching-learning in school needs to be replaced by a conscientizing synthesis if this capacity to form an "integrated overall outlook towards whole aspects of reality" is not to be eroded and destroyed.

Medway's approach does hold obvious benefits, given the continuance of schooling for some time to come at least. But such an approach needs to find a wider application than the working-class context alone in which Medway advocates it. It may be said that a working-class environment affords a richer fund of personal experiences to work from, for which reason such a project would appear more suited. But it is equally true to say that because middle-class adolescents tend to acquire more restricted and staid experiences, which in turn affect their styles of self-expression, they would be in greater need of participating in such a programme. There is no reason why the gains from such an educational experience cannot spread themselves generously across the entire class spectrum, given certain modifications for each class background.

It is one thing to say that different pupils need different degrees of guidance, but quite another to remain indifferent to educating pupils into greater independence. It would be even worse if, in giving the impression of having greater autonomy, pupils are in fact tacitly required to become more dependent on teaching staff - if only in an unofficial, non-institutionalized manner. Medway has not completely cleared my doubts on this. He says of one type of pupil: "There are students who one would class as 'well-motivated' whose commitment was perhaps less to understanding the world than to the idea of 'acquiring education'. It was an image of themselves as diligent (and successful) students that seemed to inspire them rather than interest in the particular content, though that might develop."



He does not mention how this might develop, how the teacher may become instrumental to this development, or even the importance of such development as an educational imperative.



## Chameleon

Medway rightly says that it is not easy to get these pupils to "ask questions or puzzle about things, or to make their inquiries into personal enterprises." Not easy, but not impossible, and certainly not unimportant. Quite apart from consolidating the dependence of pupils by playing along with it, and to it, particularly as a generous giver of homework to eager recipients, Medway seems unaware of the dangers of the "image of themselves as diligent (and successful) students" becoming a self-righteous and elitist virtue in itself.

And so it is with Julie, the example Medway gives of this type of pupil. It is not difficult to see how she as a receptive pupil remains just as dependent - perhaps more dependent - on him as the prime pillar of support, the giver of education. In her written correspondence to him, her notion of education is revealed by such statements as: "I have finished all my Geography off," "This morning I did ...a piece of English" and "Would you give me some English please." With the 'Please, sir, can I have some more' ethos fed into such a young person's attitude, the consumerist appetite for education-as-commodity is thus stimulated. Later on Medway favourably (and therefore unwittingly) refers to another pupil, Barry, as an "autonomous consumer." Autonomous he may be as a successful result of the project, but he remains a 'consumer'.

There is also a dubious section when the author presents to Julie "drug takers" as a first example of a group of "deviants", after she had "finished off some writing on a policeman and I having a conversation about drugs." He says to her:

*The way I think the project will go is like this: we'll study a few examples of different groups of deviants. Drug-takers is the first, but we'll do others. Then I'll probably present you with some problem (some sort of deviant behaviour) and ask you to explain it.*

The impression comes across strongly that it is left to the teacher to label which sort of behaviour passes for deviance, and it is the pupil's duty to accept and work from the teacher's assumption and judgement rather than to question them. Such assumptions implicitly imbedded in lessons have significant implications for the

'given' construction of social norms and values; as part of an educational practice that purports or strives to be open and free ('autonomous'), they can be alarming. So it is hardly surprising to find Julie has little difficulty in accepting the suggestion. She replies by saying: "Yes I think it will be a good idea how to go on with my project."

Naturally, Medway discovers that a problem with many of the pupils is the lack of a critical analysis in their work. This could be largely attributed to the staff not adequately inspiring the pupils to acquire a critical analysis to their work. So the work turned out by many of the pupils is seen as subjectively descriptive and not objectively ascriptive; what Medway calls 'celebratory' rather than 'sociological'. He notes that one of the pupils, Neil, became interested in politics through his work, and so got involved in current affairs programmes. Yet nowhere was there an indication of Neil being encouraged to question the politics of the news. He only got the politics *from* the news, treating the media as just another bank of impartial information - a most unscientizing approach. Even when it does come to politics, what the pupils got was no more than an education in areas to do with things concerned with politics, rather than political education, let alone *politicized* education. So their work remains 'celebratory' with precious little to celebrate.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that some pupils had retained their earlier conditioning from conventional schooling, with comments like: "humanities teachers are soft and do not show enough discipline in class," "a lot of time wasted...by teachers not making pupils work," and, on mixed-ability groups: "pulled down with being put in with 'the dunces'." All this reflects an obvious lack of support that might have come from a solid bedrock of commitment among pupils, teachers and parents alike. These various limitations are largely caused by the project being an isolated operation; and, like most minorities, is slighted by those that constitute the norm. Medway himself is not above making assumptions perhaps best described as traditional. He has the notion that there is necessarily

some common linear process in the acquisition of attitudes and skills. There is one, an artificial one, *but only given* the hierarchical structure of school and curriculum, which prescribes essays like 'My School' and 'My Home' to the earlier years, and essays about the social significance of schooling and housing to the later years. What such a structure does is a) force the idea that a subjective self-expression is necessarily an early stage to grow out of, and an objective, 'scientific' attitude necessarily a mature stage to grow into; b) assume that all pupils will ultimately and naturally



## Chameleon

grow up to be sociologists (rather than poets or novelists); c) by generally subjecting and keeping pupils in their early years to a consciously designed atmosphere of subjectivism and subjectivity, it stunts their autonomous development of a dialectical mode of enquiry at their own pace.

The project is just about as far as you could go in progressive education today whilst still clutching at a curriculum. All that remain are the rudiments of a curriculum, but Medway does not quibble over the fact that it is still a curriculum. Yet the book, in telling of such a fruitful scheme, fails to inform readers of how similar schemes may be set up.

I came away liking the book rather more for what it represents than for what it is. Medway himself may well agree - whilst remaining optimistic and hopeful, he conceded that "What happened was not especially remarkable. In another climate....(eg. the late 'sixties)....experiments like ours would probably have proliferated and ours would have been in no way outstanding...." The hard times in educational provision today, at one end feeding educational 'failures' into the armed forces and at the other making important projects like this one more difficult to come by, make this book out to be more than what it perhaps is. Still it makes for encouraging reading if you're involved in innovations, or would like to be, but be critically aware of the limitations that remain within it.

Bunn Nagara



# CHILDREN

**Closely Observed Children**  
by Michael Armstrong  
published by Chameleon Books  
£2.95.

Childhood is concerned with the serious business of acquiring knowledge and putting that knowledge into practice in order to understand the world. Mike Armstrong's purpose in **Closely Observed Children** is to understand the understanding of young children.

After six years of teaching in a community college he was given sabbatical leave to carry out his research in a Leicestershire primary school. This book is part of the extensive daily diary he kept as a teacher's helper in a class of 8-9 year olds. In it a detailed look is given at examples of the children's work in areas of writing, pattern making, art and model making. Mike Armstrong shows, through individual examples, the thought and purpose children put into their work; how they consciously strive to use their developing skills; how Paul, for instance, changed, retouched and added things to his painting until it represented precisely the idea in his mind. Other children appropriated complex mathematical and scientific theories by constructing patterns on a pegboard and by designing and propelling a cotton reel tank. The chapter on children's writing treats the slightest and briefest piece of work with care and respect. Mike Armstrong is not unduly concerned with length, spelling and punctuation, but wishes to understand how print manages to convey all that language, gesture and intonation carry in conversation.

He demonstrates that children choose with great care their vocabulary and syntax in order to make their stories expressive of excitement, boredom, sadness or surprise. It is not a hit and miss affair, but a thoughtful, concentrated

effort. Quoting Blake the book concludes 'Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity'.

Mike Armstrong sees the role of teacher, and equally the parent or friend, as one of the sympathetic listener and suggestor. It is not simply enough to provide stimulating materials and then retreat into the background. S/he must give advice, support and help when needed. And there are plenty of examples in the book where adults do this. It is important not to interfere and take over a child's project, but help in punctuation, drawing and presentation may be just what the child needs. The adult is a facilitator of learning, not the presenter of facts.

Much of what **Closely Observed Children** has to say is a restatement of the findings of the Plowden Report. The late '60s, under its influence, saw a growth in informal or progressive schooling. It was the time when open plan, integrated day, vertical grouping and educational innovation were possible. Since the mid-'70s and the Black Papers, the Bennett Report,



and Rhodes Boyson's speeches Plowden has lost favour. Mike Armstrong's book is an attempt in some ways to reverse that trend and as such is very welcome. If reading it encourages a few more teachers to treat all children with the respect, sympathy and integrity Mike Armstrong shows then it is worthwhile. For he pays equal regard to children of all abilities, whether they have accomplished two lines of writing or two pages; the ideas, effort and self-reliance of the child are what matters.

Mike Armstrong comes across as an exceptional teacher in an exceptional school. Sherard School, where he did his research, is a modern, well designed and

equipped open plan school. It is thought highly of by local advisors and has a head teacher committed to providing a flexible learning environment. The author was in a privileged position there; his research had the full support of the LEA and he was able to spend as much time as he liked with the individual children. The teacher he worked alongside was in sympathy with his aims and methods and still retained overall responsibility for the education of the 32 children in the class.

One cannot fairly criticise the book for not examining the problems a class teacher may experience carrying out a similar philosophy in a less privileged situation. This was not the intention of the research. But these problems remain and are worth considering. If the system — your head, parents, local examining board, and education committee all demand an adherence to the formal acquisition of the 3 Rs, then where do you find the space and time to do much else? If conformity and discipline are required then the teacher who does not conform will not last long in the system. If a teacher is in charge of 32 children then the time in each day which can be devoted to each child is a maximum of eight minutes. Not a lot of intellectual stimulation can be developed in eight minutes.

The educational climate of the '80s does not promise to be favourable. Growing unemployment leads to the demand for training in place of education and financial cutbacks are creating large classes with an overworked and demoralised teaching staff. **Closely Observed Children** describes what can be achieved in an ideal situation, but offers no signposts on the road to achieving it. The future looks bleak and the ones who will suffer are the children, attempting to make sense of the world in a stultifying, non-creative repressive environment.

J.W.



## SUBSCRIBE HERE...

I'd like a subscription to LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION beginning with issue number

I'd like the following back issues

I enclose a cheque/postal order for

Name .....

Address .....

Country ..... Date .....

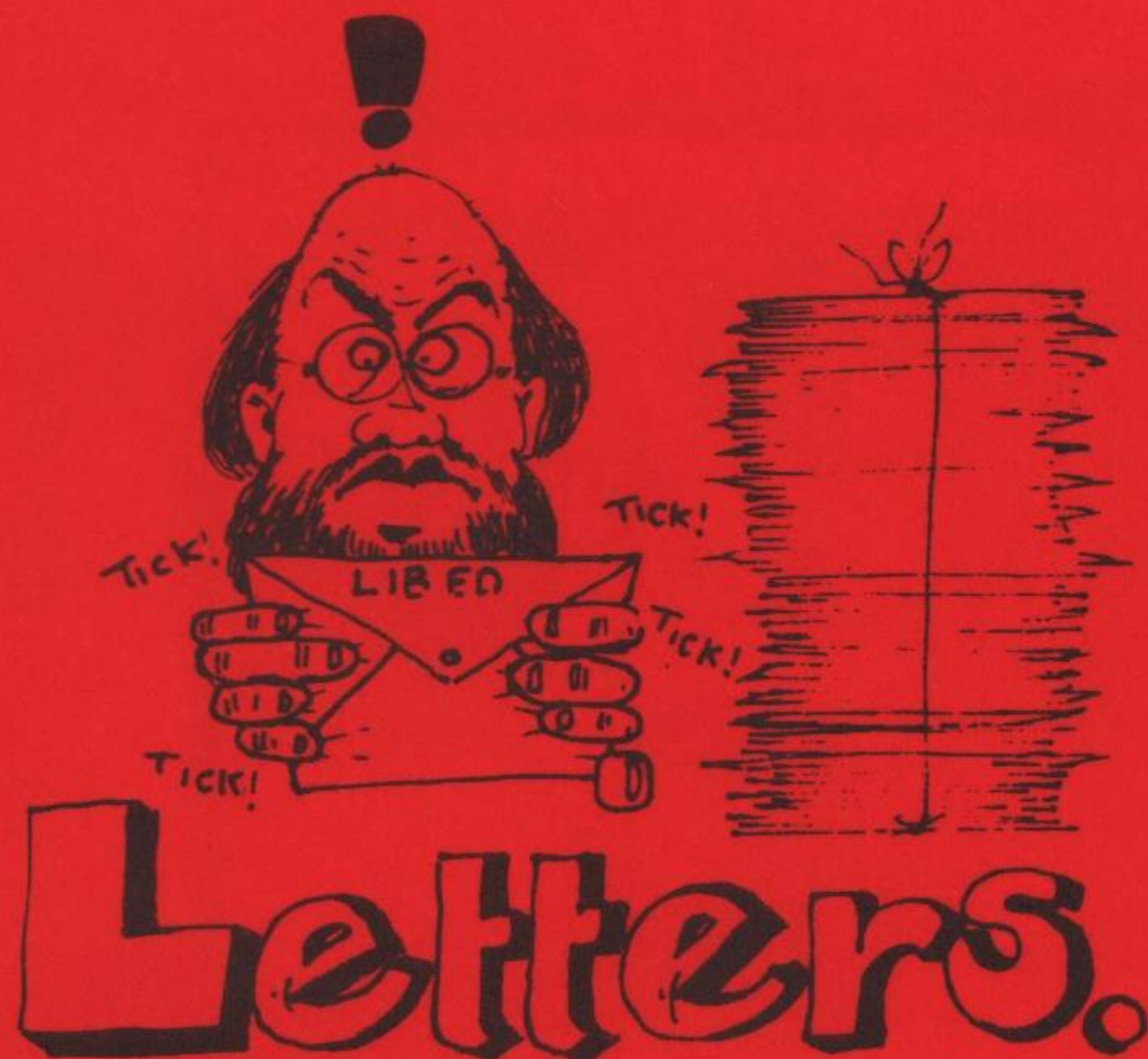
Send this form to LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION  
6 BEACONSFIELD ROAD LEICESTER  
ENGLAND

cover price 40p  
single copy UK and surface mail abroad 55p/\$1.50  
4 issue sub UK and surface mail abroad  
for individuals £2/\$5  
institutions and libraries £4/\$10  
4 issue sub airmail Europe £4  
4 issue sub airmail elsewhere £5/\$13

payment in sterling or with international money order only

### BULK ORDERS

Our bookshop distributor is Fulltime Distribution  
27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R 0AT  
(UK) All other orders and surface mail abroad £3  
for 10 copies (post paid)



Northants.

Dear Friends,

This letter is a mixture of recollections and conclusions from the Lib Ed conference 25/26 October, I hope it helps people to see what Lib Ed is about. I went to the conference hoping for an opportunity to talk about, listen to and concentrate my thoughts on the range of ideas I've so enjoyed seeing written about in Lib Ed. That is the crushing effect of schools on young people, how we might work out other ways of organising things so that we are all able to learn skills needed for life without having our minds and souls worn into submission, and also the connected issues of young peoples' role in society and philosophies of liberation in general. As I understand it the conference was organised to gather more active support for the small group of people in Leicester who produce the magazine and are struggling to keep on getting it out regularly. Apart from a couple of films and I think one large group discussion on the future of Lib Ed it was small discussion groups that filled the bulk of the time.

Although they didn't stick very closely to the titles, such as the libertarian theory of education, adventure playgrounds and the cuts in education, I thought that some interesting discussions developed from these starting points. Sometimes we did seem to be going back to very simple questions which Lib Ed has probably thought possible to assume we all had the same approach, for instance, to the value of free schools or how to operate as a teacher in a school facing cut backs.

Personally I got a lot out of the discussions, mostly because of the variety of ideas and ways of looking at things that came out and just the thrill of all these people also caring about issues which sometimes get to feel like my pet obsession. That large discussion on the future of Lib Ed was pretty interesting also, one thing that came across was that quite a few readers look to the magazine

to provide them with a libertarian view to certain subjects but do not feel they could write from that standpoint themselves - That's what they rely on Lib Ed to do for them!

This is a bit of a problem, as Lib Ed has got better organised, more slick and more solid in its analysis of things it has developed into something which is just a bit unapproachable. This is mostly due to very professional look the production group achieves in spite of many other pulls on their time and energy.

I think this a problem we can all overcome by showing that just because a magazine is well produced doesn't mean it has to be unapproachable at all. Lib Ed really does need all sorts of people to write letters to it and send things in, let's all go and do that right now!

Love Peace and Happiness

Steve Kerr



Dear Lib. Ed.

I was rather intrigued by your point about the difference between the liberal and libertarian point of view. I know it would be boring for long term readers, but if one of your group could write an article explaining what this means in terms of Education, then people like me — might become the new readers of Lib. Ed. Most parents I know feel that even to discuss or mention home education is subversive — even when a very conventional view of education is taken. Parents and children are conditioned from birth to accept education in the form offered. e.g. mothers take children to creche and playgroup to "get them used" to periods of separation rather than for the child's own benefit. I do think anarchists and libertarians are very isolated from the average parent. You should turn your attention to this problem — and try to use your magazine to understand and bridge the gap.

F.H.  
Hitchin,  
Herts.



Dear Friends,

I live alone with my 2 year old son Luke and realise I need the help and support of others who sympathise with my feeling that children (and adults) should live and learn in an

atmosphere of love and freedom. I cannot relax and make my home anywhere until these needs are met. It seems I have 2 alternatives — either to live in a Community out of which blossoms its own 'school' or to find a school already established along these lines and make my home nearby. Any advice will be more than welcome — people I can contact — information on schools, communities, education — anything.

Can you help?

Hoping to hear from you soon,  
Yours sincerely,  
A.M.  
Redruth,  
Cornwall.

*replies c/o Lib. Ed.*



Dear Comrades,

Many thanks for sending issue 29 which was safely received. Sorry to hear that the mag. is in such a perilous position — I hope that the conference went well and has given you the support and enthusiasm needed to continue.

I'll be writing shortly on my impressions of 29 and will try to dig up one or two articles for future issues (if you like them of course!). In the meantime hang in there, and don't go thinking that your efforts aren't much appreciated.

Warm regards from all here,  
Mike S  
(for Jura Books Collective)

**We're hanging in, Mike!. Thanks for your support and don't forget the articles.**



**So You Think You've Got Problems**  
Dear Comrades,

Could you please send me a sample copy of Libertarian Education. Also, let me know how much a subscription to Libertarian Education is, since I would possibly be interested in subscribing to it. Also, if possible, could you send me a list of Anarchist, Anarcho-Marxist, and Libertarian schools and colleges including those which are underground.

In Solidarity,  
Kuzumudi Guidi  
Germantown, Tennessee, U.S.A.

