

Groups

Lib Ed groups

Leicester 0455-209029
Bristol 0272-41380

National Union of Students

461 Holloway Rd, London N7
01-272 8900

National Union of Teachers

Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.
01-388 6191

Forest School Camps

Lorna English (Secretary), 110 Burbage Road, London SE24 9HD
(A radical organisation that arranges camps for children - it's very decentralised)

Woodcraft Folk

13 Ritherton Road, London SW17
01-672 6031
(kind of non-sexist, non-militarist scouts and brownies)

Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment

18 Victoria Park Square, London E2
01-980 8523

Teachers for Animal Rights

c/o Wanda Dejlidko, Lynwood Rd, London SW 17

All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism

Panther House, Room 216, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1.

Gay Teachers Group

BM Gay Teacher, London WC1N 3XX.
01-837 7234

Education Otherwise

25 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Cambs.
(For everyone who practices or supports the right of children to learn without schooling)

Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement

BM GYM, London WC1N 3XX
01-317 9690

Campaign against Military Research on Campus (CAMROC)

190 Burdett Road, London E3 4AA
01-980 2455

Liberation Network of People with Disabilities

c/o Townsend House, Green Lanes, Marshfield, Chippenham, Wilts.

New Education Directory

15 Bellevue, Clifton, Bristol BS8 1DB
0272-735091

Play Movement

c/o 97 Dale Street, Lancaster LA1 3AP
0524-34439
(Committed to changing the human built environment to better serve the needs of children)

Resources

Play for Life

31b Ipswich Road, Norwich NR2 2LN
(Promotes and supplies life affirming toys and games. Write for catalogue enclosing £1)

Scottish Civil Liberty Trust

146 Holland Street, Glasgow G2 4NG
(Provides legal information and has published a series of leaflets aimed at young people in Scotland)

Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project

Wyvil Rd. School, Wyvil Rd., London SW8.
01-627 2662

Advisory Centre for Education

18 Victoria Park Sq., London E2.
01-980 4596

Children's Legal Centre

20 Compton Terrace, London N1.
01-359 6251

Minority Rights Group

29 Craven St., London WC2N 5NG.
01-930 6659

Peace Education Project

Peace Pledge Union, 6 Endsleigh St., London WC1.
01-387 5501

Special listing

Association for Curriculum Development

PO Box 563, London N16 8XD.

Shocking Pink

Young Women's Magazine Collective, c/o 55 Acre Lane, Brixton, London SW2
(A 4 issue sub to this magazine costs £2.40)

Advisory Service for Squatters

2 St Paul's Road, London N1
(info on how to squat and where to contact the nearest squatters group. They publish *The Squatters Handbook*)

Leicester Outwork Campaign

132 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PA

White Lion Free School

57 White Lion Street, London N1
(Britain's oldest city free school)

Tamariki Free School

Woolston, Christ Church, New Zealand

SAC (Syndikalisterna)

Svenvagen 98, 113 50 Stockholm, Sweden
tel: 08-34-35-59

Le CERISE

77 rue des Haies, 75020 Paris, France

Centro Studi Libertari

via Rovetta 27, 20127 Milano, Italia.
(Libertarian study centre and archive, publishes the journal "Volontà")

Housmans Mail Order

5 Caledonian Road, London N1
(Suppliers of a wide range of libertarian literature by post; send for their catalogue of titles)

Third World Publications

151 Stratford Road, Birmingham B11 1RD.
021-773 6572

Letterbox Library

5 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN.
01-254 1640
(Specialise in non-sexist and multicultural books for children. For details of their free catalogue, write or phone.)

Commonweal Collection

c/o J.B.Priestley Library, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP.
(A small library designed for anyone interested in libertarian, anarchist and pacifist ideas.)

Feminist Library

Hungerford House, Victoria Embankment, London WC2N 6PA.
01-930 0715

New University

24 South Road, Hockley, Birmingham B18
021-551 1679
(An alternative education project)

Circule-Air

Agence Informations Enfance, 29 rue Davy, 75017 Paris, France.
tel: (1) 42-28-71-64
(A French based alternative educational magazine and organisation.)

Assn. Nationale pour l'Education Nouvelle

1 rue des Neffiers, 31400 Toulouse, France
tel: 61-52-45-10

Edizioni Anarchismo

Casello Postale 61, 95100 Catania, Italy

CNT-AIT-Ensenyament

Calle Unio 16, 1-1, Barcelona 08001, Spain
tel: 301-06-12

CNT-Federacio d'Ensenyament de Catalunya

Roger de Lluria, 123 pral, 08037 Barcelona, Spain
tel: 215-13-64 or 215-19-83

Familial, Day Nursery Kindergarten School

PO Box 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal

KAP (Kooperativet Arbetets Pedagogik)

Skeppsholmen, S-111 49 Stockholm

KRUT (Kritisk UtbildningsTidskrift)

Torpedverkstaden, Skeppsholmen, S111 49 Stockholm

Lib ED

Spring '88 50p

A magazine for the liberation of learning

Nellie Dick remembers
Interview with a free school pioneer

Curriculum Cop
Killer in the rain

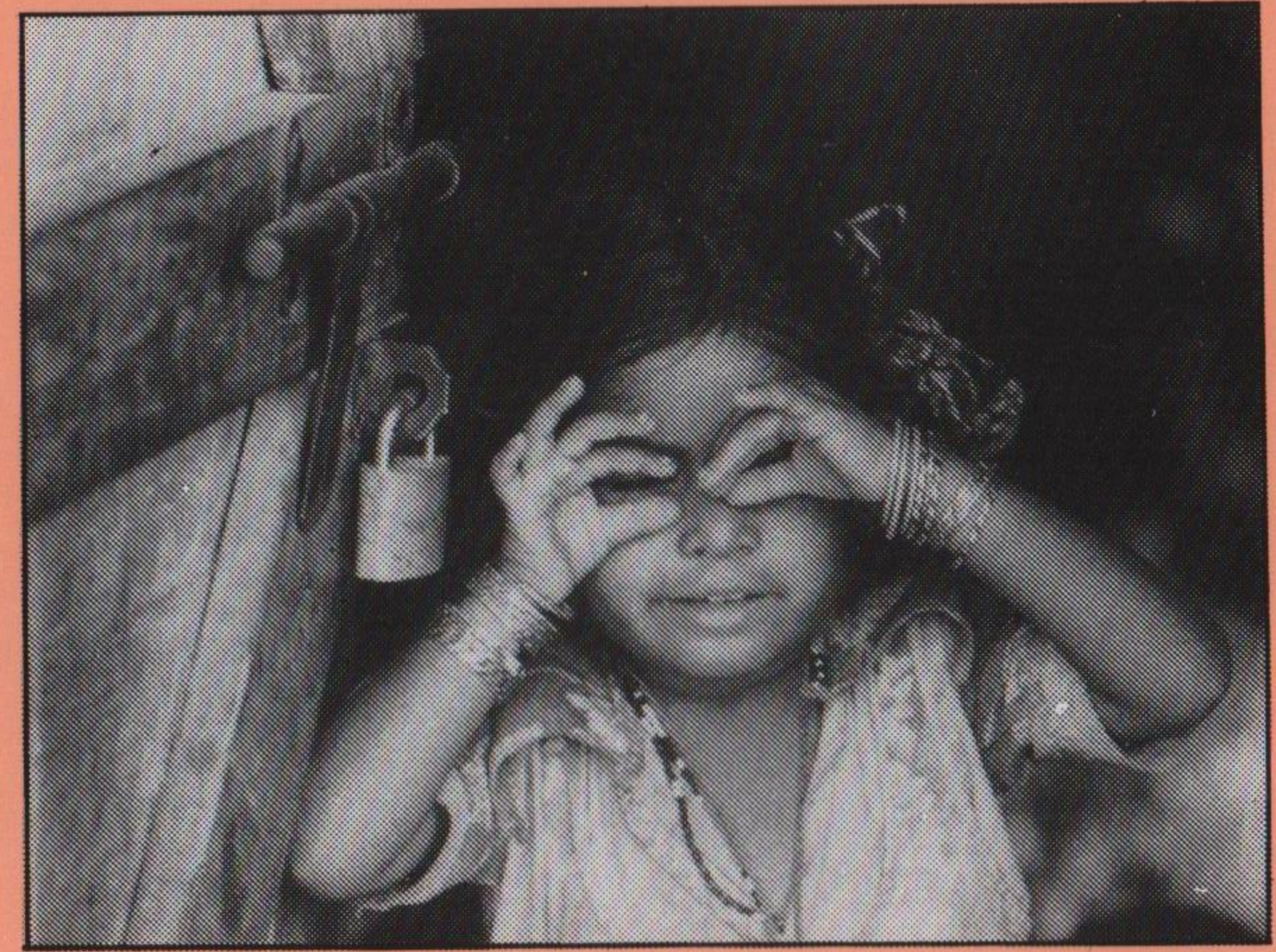
Information Technology
Techno-fear, anti-tech and the videodisc

GLOBAL VIEW
SPECIAL
FEATURE

Libertarian EDUCATION

A magazine for the liberation of learning

Vol 2 No 7 Spring 1988



COVER PHOTO: Sue Darlow / Format

On October 3rd, 150 people met at the Lib Ed conference and, amongst other things, denounced the government's plans to move state education back into the Dark Ages. A month later, Thatcher suggested that a return to the "Three Rs" is not enough. We now learn that she wants three more Rs, religion, right and wrong. And our response? Another "R" - "R" for rubbish.

Yet you would have thought that schools already have enough rules and controls for the sanctimonious Nanny Thatcher. They already mirror the competitive, but controlled, class-ridden, crumbling society that we live in. Using genuine concern about the state of education today Nanny is now seeking, under the guise of parents' power, to enforce control from central government, removing any independence that schools may have had.

If schools are to be "R" oriented, then there is one we are interested in - rights. Children have a right to independence in schools, they have a right to learn in a non-authoritarian atmosphere, they have a right to express their views on the current state of society and shape its development.

One of the roles of Lib Ed magazine is to examine the way this society educates its members. Schools obviously play an important part in the process of manufacturing docile people for the shop-floor, office and market-place. So much of our space will inevitably be devoted to analysis of schooling. However, schools, because of their very nature, do allow some scope for libertarian teachers to have an influence counter to the ideology of the school. Lib Ed exists to publicise and encourage this work.

As well as forming an analysis of how things are, we want to discuss how a non-patriarchal anarchist society might educate, and to offer examples of existing alternative education projects which may give some clues, even if only to what should be avoided.

But school is only one of the agents of conformity, and, certainly, plenty of learning takes place outside of school. Part of our role, then, is to look at non-institutional learning, particularly at, for instance, the media, from which we learn to have 'acceptable' attitudes and opinions.

Finally, the most difficult task must be to suggest ways of changing what is into what might be. We welcome the active participation of our readers!

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Killer in the rain

Monday, 9.40 "Zip the lip, scumbag", I growled.

The teacher recoiled as if I had physically struck him, something I was seriously contemplating.

"All you bums do is whine. So what if the roof does leak here and there? You stiffies seem to think that every problem can be solved by throwing money at it. Not true! The only way to raise standards is if garbage like you get on with administering the curriculum and quit causing trouble. Now if you don't want to spend the next six months in an INSET camp, butt out".

The jerk slunk away, back to his pre-doles crouched under their umbrellas and polythene sheets. I shifted myself a little to the right, trying to find a space in the goddam classroom where rain didn't leak in.



Photo by John Lowings.

10.30 Meeting with the Headmaster, who had flown in especially from the Canary Islands to be briefed on the crisis. Over a six month period his comp's weekly assessments had shown a disturbing upsurge in the social conscience quotient, way beyond acceptable levels. Some of the pre-doles were beginning to care! There were signs of *Sun* rejection and contraband copies of that illegal Commie crapsheet, *The Guardian*, had been found in the toilets. Pinko teachers were obviously at work. We would find them and re-educate them in the ways of BIG MOTHER. We would brand the regime's motto on their lousy souls: TO THOSE THAT HAVE SHALL BE GIVEN, FROM THOSE THAT HAVE NOT SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY.

The Headmaster admitted that there was discontent among the teachers. Some still complained about being disenfranchised although he couldn't remember any of their names. Some objected to Executive privileges. to the company cars, the villas abroad, the servants.

"Just jealousy really", he said.

"Yeah", I replied philosophically. "Success is like farting, boss. Only your own smells good".

"Not exactly how I would put it", he smirked, "but essentially correct. Mind you I don't think any of them would engage in anything subversive. They haven't got the time. Still, I must be off now. Don't want to keep the helicopter waiting. Good hunting."

11.40 Inspected a class of 200 pre-doles supervised entirely by a squad of UQs*. They were studying Physics which involved watching a series of videos made by the country's last Physics teacher shortly before he died. I called the senior UQ over.

"How effective do you find this teaching method, friend?" I asked.

"Dunno and don' care," he replied, "can't unnerstan' it all messeff. A load of old bollocks if you ask me."

"Thanks for your help, friend." I replied.

"Have a nice day." His manner, like most UQs, was somewhat crude, but he and his team had the "can do" philosophy. They were committed, hardworking, enthusiastic and cheap, above all cheap!

1.50 "OK, ratface! What's the meaning of this?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said, a slight quiver in her voice.

"You're paid to teach English Lit., dogbreath. And when the parents vote to have Sir Geoffrey Archer on the syllabus, they want Sir Geoffrey Archer on the syllabus."

"He is on the syllabus. He's all there is on the bloody syllabus."

"Yeah, but what about the questions you're setting? 'Why would Geoffrey Archer give £2000 to a woman he had never met. Discuss with reference to the early novels'. And 'Only a man with a spotty back could have written *Kane and Abel*. Discuss'. I could go on."

She giggled. The broad thought it was funny.

"Take her away, boys. This'll earn you five years unpaid exam moderation, doll." As she was lead away, she shouted out, "What about Shakespeare, Shelley, Lawrence, Amis! You can stuff Geoffrey Archer right up..."

I missed the rest.

2.30 Supervised interrogation of chief suspect, a Deputy Head with a radical past. He had been a kaftan lefty in Rank and File years before and, although he had kept his nose clean and jumped through all the right hoops since the advent of BIG MOTHER, he was the only lead we had.

We gave him the Third Degree, the one you don't get increments for. After ten minutes of genial smalltalk, I suddenly brought my Bakerlite down across his face, busting his nose, breaking his teeth. One of the boys kneed him where it hurts and he crashed to the floor. We played football with the jerk. "That's enough boys."

I unzipped my fly and urinated on the bum. I leaned over him, sneering. "I suppose you and your buddies will all be going on strike now punk." Through the vomit and blood he gasped his reply: "No! No! The children must come first".

He was obviously an AMMA member. The fink was in the clear.

Tuesday, 8.10 We met in the staffroom while the teachers were outside doing their Japanese-style exercises and singing the school anthem. Every squad member reported the same. Despite three arrests for minor contractual infringements and the detention of a Shakespeare freak, there was no evidence whatsoever of an underground subversive network. The only other possible conclusion was terrifying: the predoles were developing a social conscience ON THEIR OWN! This was serious! BIG MOTHER would have to be told!

Next issue: The reintroduction of corporal punishment for teachers is finally agreed to after weeks of heated discussion between the leaders of the Secondary Heads Institute of Teacher-bashing and the Curriculum Cops. The SHITs demand more resources if they are to do the job properly and insist on wider differentials because of added responsibility!

* UQ unqualified teacher (editors note)

Techno-fear, anti tech and the videodisc

Graham Wade takes a look at some of the advantages of interactive videodisc technology for education.

THERE IS A powerful tradition among radicals, leftists and even libertarians that is distrustful and suspicious of high technology. There are many reasons why this should be so - some of them rather more valid than others. For instance, it is often the case that high-tech developments come directly, or as spin-offs, from the war industry (frequently referred to as defence research).

High-technology in the form of robotics puts people out of work (remember the Luddites?) and, in the form of computers, helps the DHSS keep a much closer tab on its customers. The police and armed forces employ high-resolution video systems (often in conjunction with infra-red technology) to spy on us from satellites, helicopters and hidden cameras in the local shopping centre. High-tech seems to have a lot to answer for. It's often invented by authority for authority, for use in a way that makes sure authority remains in authority.

In education the same kind of attitude exists in a modified form - and extends beyond just the radical fringe. Teachers love to think that even part of their work could never be adequately replaced by machines. While conceding that a robot might be able to build something technical like a car, they dismiss the idea of teaching machines because the human element of understanding, caring and personal commitment would be absent. (It might be worth considering how much understanding, caring and personal commitment most teachers exercise in their jobs.)

Techno-fear

The concept of programmed learning has always met with varying degrees of resistance at the chalkface. On one level this can be explained by the attitude that machines aren't human. On another level it can be caused by techno-fear - a deep-down fear of technology particularly prevalent among arts-trained teachers. This fear is based largely on plain ignorance - they don't know the first thing about computers, electrical wiring or the internal combustion engine - and what's more they don't want to and have no intention of wanting to. The anti-tech leanings of our general education system through this century lie at the root of this attitude.

But there are some signs that technology is being used as a positive learning tool in education. Open learning techniques - also called distance learning - have gained respectability largely through

the high-profile activities of the Open University.

Television programmes, video cassettes, computers have all been effectively used as part of distance learning packages. Increasingly educationalists are coming to believe that distance learning is the only workable way of re-educating and re-training societies that are undergoing rapid technological change. The technologies allow people to study in their homes and workplaces, while the need to go to an institutional classroom with a group of other students and a teacher is becoming less. Personal tutors and summer schools are still needed, but they play a less prominent role.

Poor nations

For third world countries, the techniques of distance learning often offer the only viable way of educating rural and semi-rural populations. But clearly the more expensive layers of technology pose a problem for poor nations - nevertheless, well planned systems can still prove cost-effective.

Even in the most high-tech countries of the first world - of which Britain is a down-the-league member - there are massive problems of understanding what this sophisticated technology can do and how it can best be used. There are also imminent dangers that people will be divided into those with access to the technology - allowing them to earn more - and those without access, who will be left behind in growing poverty (the so-called underclass).

One technology that I'd like to take a look at a little more closely is that of the interactive videodisc, which has been around since the early 1980s. Essentially it combines the twin technologies of video (the ability to record moving pictures electronically) and computers. At the risk of over-simplification, with videodisc the computer allows the pictures and sound to be manipulated and accessed in great quantity and at great speed.

Workstation

Interactive videodisc usually employs a commercially available industrial videodisc player (which has an in-built computer) linked through an interface to another more powerful microprocessor (or computer). That's the hardware side, which also includes a screen on which to display the pictures, a speaker to carry the sound and some kind of access mechanism like a keyboard or joystick device. All of this is

often referred to as a workstation. A typical workstation costs around £3,000.

Then there's the software - the raw data manipulated by the hardware and presented visually and orally to the user. That takes the form of the videodisc - which looks like a silver-coated LP record - and computer disks or tape.

Laser technology

The videodisc, in its Philips LaserVision version - there are other, but less important versions on the market - is based on laser technology. The information - both sound and pictures - is embedded on the surface of the disc in minute pits and bumps which can be read by a laser beam and translated into sound and pictures. Each disc side can hold 54,000 frames of video information and each can be accurately accessed within seconds and displayed on the screen as a perfect still picture. The quality of laser-read pictures is infinitely superior to those produced from video-cassette tape.

As a storage medium for information - and as a teaching resource - the system offers vast potential. Every picture in every major art gallery in the world plus background details could be held comfortably on a single disc - allowing almost instant access by just punching the relevant frame number on a keypad. The surface of a videodisc never wears out because it is laser-read and covered with a protective plastic layer - it never comes into contact with any mechanical device so its quality should remain perfect.

Domesday project

The most well known effort to popularise videodisc came with the BBC Domesday project, which illustrates well the vast information handling capacities of videodisc. It offered two discs - the *National Disc* and the *Community Disc*. The former contains the whole of the 1981 population census, the General Household Survey, the Family Expenditure Survey and a mass of other data collected from newspapers, magazines and publications like *Hansard*. Information can be manipulated so that graphic displays of population densities or water resources or countless other measures can be overlaid and compared on maps.

The *Community Disc* holds 150,000 screen pages of text and 20,000 pictures - all on something the size of an LP. Some 24,000 Ordnance Survey maps are on it and these can be used with a moving cursor (called a mouse) to literally travel around

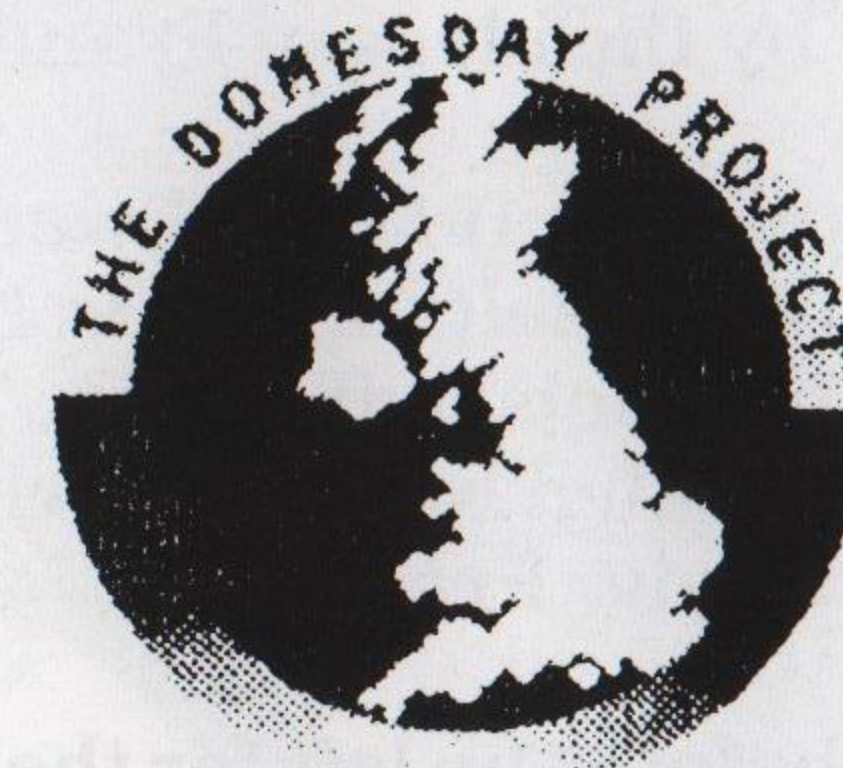
them. Call up information on the remotest village and you'll be able to see pictures of it and information collected as part of the biggest community survey ever undertaken in Britain. You can cut from satellite photographs right down to a picture of the local church. At around £250 for both the discs you were effectively buying map and survey information that in printed form would cost many thousands of pounds, a point that wasn't lost on many businesses, but was on impoverished schools.

No teacher

In its most interactive forms, videodisc can perform as a stand-alone teaching package with no teacher. The Videodisc Group at the Open University's Production Centre, now called BBC Milton Keynes, has been at the forefront of these developments.

Its recent *Stress at Work* disc is aimed at teaching the sensitive topic of stress awareness to managers in industry. Through a special drama of a group of managers undergoing a takeover by a US Corporation, the disc allows users to focus on a range of carefully constructed personalities. The user can investigate each of them using an enormous range of

personal data from bank balances, correspondence, medical records, and even close-up details of all the rooms in their homes. Painstakingly built up by psychologists the disc allows users to



confront these issues meaningfully, but in privacy. BBC Milton Keynes, desperately short of cash, is hoping to subsidise its other activities by selling the *Stress* software at a pricey £2450.

School's project

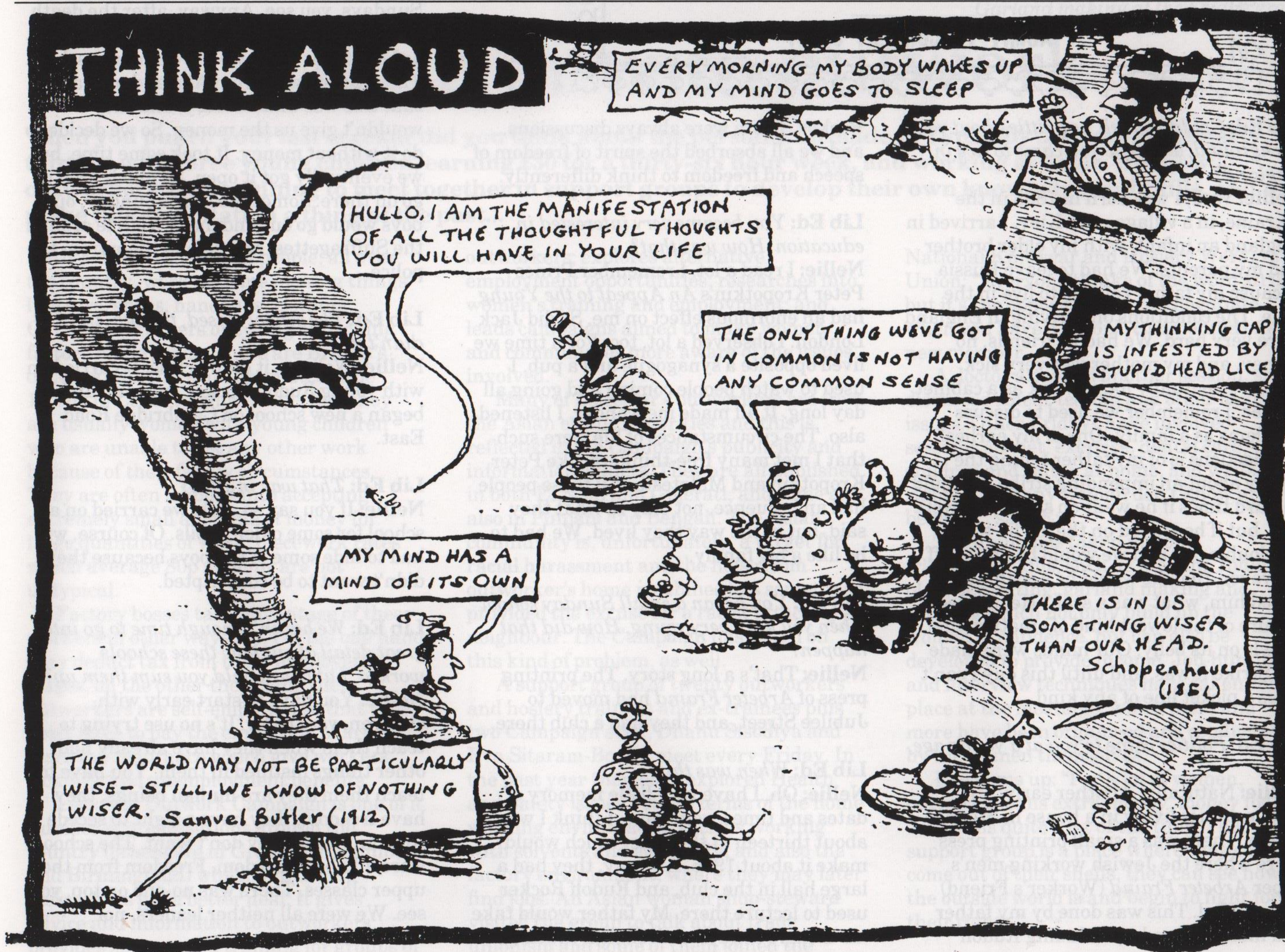
A range of experimental interactive videodiscs, costing a total of over £1 million to produce, has just been completed in various schools and colleges, as part of the government-backed Interactive Video in Schools project. These cover several levels of age group across wide curriculum areas. One, on ecology for primary schoolchildren

called *Life and Energy*, includes a most detailed surrogate field trip covering different seasons in an Oxfordshire wood. Similarly, the *Ecodisc* from the BBC provides a highly detailed account of wildlife and plantlife in a Devon nature reserve.

Signpost

It is difficult in print, and in a few hundred words, to convey the richness of teaching sophistication and resources which videodisc technology offers. I merely wish to erect a small signpost that may encourage you to look at the area more closely if the opportunity arises, rather than dismissing it as high-tech. The machines can be operated happily by five-year-olds, but they do remain expensive to buy, which inevitably restricts access for most state schools.

It is worth remembering that the pioneers of both cinema and television technology believed the new media would be used mainly to revolutionise education. They didn't foresee their prostitution to mass entertainment and advertising. It would be a great pity if the truly remarkable potential of interactive videodisc should be diverted and overlooked in the same way.

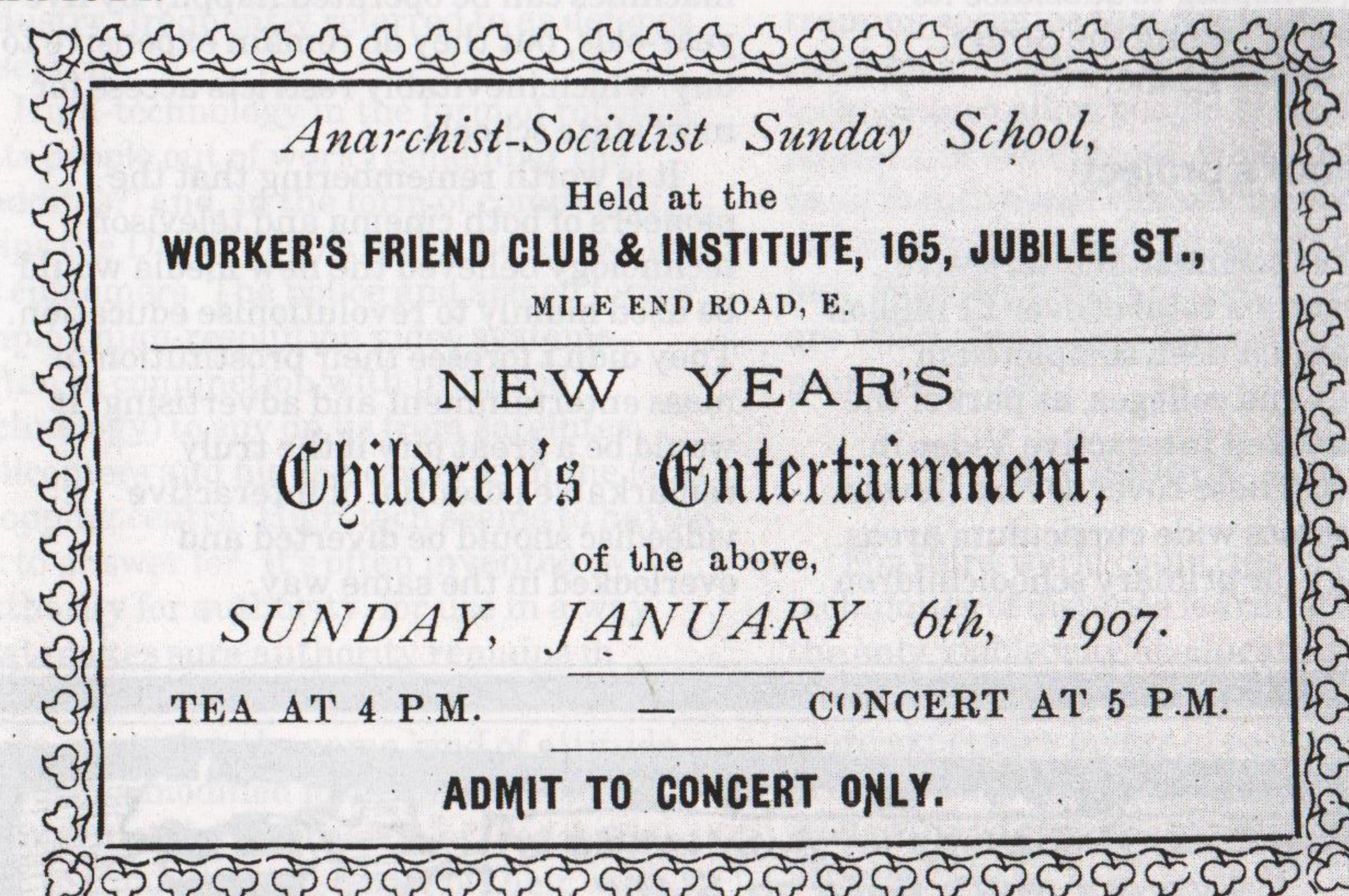


A pioneer for freedom

Today Nellie Dick, aged 94, lives in Miami. From 1933 to 1958 she was co-principal, with her husband Jim, of the Modern School at Lakewood, New Jersey. It was an initiative much influenced by the ideas of Francisco Ferrer.

The Dicks had emigrated to America from England in 1917, and were, for a long time, associated with the Modern School at Shelton, also in New Jersey, amongst the first of the Ferrer-influenced schools in the USA. The history of these schools has been admirably documented by Paul Avrich, in *The Modern School Movement* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1980).

Nellie recently talked to Lib Ed, about her life before she left for the US, and how she helped pioneer the development of a series of libertarian schools amongst fellow Jews in the East End of London, between 1906 and 1914.



Lib Ed: Could you tell us a little about your background, and how you came to live in England?

Nellie: Well, I was born in 1893 in the Ukraine, in a village near Kiev. I arrived in England an infant, with my older brother and my parents. We had to leave Russia because my father refused to live in the Pale. The conditions on arriving in England were very hard. We had no friends, no money, and my mother was very sick. Father eventually found work as a cabinet maker. I remember we used to discuss problems as a family. One of my earliest recollections is of my father telling the family about an impending strike. It would be hard times if he went on strike, we were told, but if he stayed on the job he would get double pay and we would be better off. However, then he would be a scab. We asked him, what was a scab? He painted a picture of the lowest kind of creature that crawls on its belly. Our minds were made up. Strike it was, and until this day I can't cross a picket line of any kind.

Lib Ed: Politics came to you at a young age, then.

Nellie: Naturally. Another early recollection is living in a house in Stepney Green. There was a small printing press there where the Jewish working men's paper *Arbeter Fraind* (Worker's Friend) was printed. This was done by my father and many comrades, including Rudolf

Rocker. There were always discussions, and we all absorbed the spirit of freedom of speech and freedom to think differently.

Lib Ed: You became very interested in education. How was that?

Nellie: I read a lot. I remember Prince Peter Kropotkin's *An Appeal to the Young* had an enormous effect on me. So did Jack London. I observed a lot, too. For a time we lived opposite a synagogue and a pub. I used to watch people coming and going all day long. It all made me wonder. I listened also. The circumstances of life were such that I met many free-thinkers, like Peter Kropotkin and Malatesta. All these people had an influence, not only in what they said, but in the way they lived. We had to be like a big family.

Lib Ed: You began a small Sunday school when you were very young. How did that happen?

Nellie: That's a long story. The printing press of *Arbeter Fraind* had moved to Jubilee Street, and they had a club there.

Lib Ed: When was this?

Nellie: Oh, I have very little memory of dates and times, you know. I think I was about thirteen at the time, which would make it about 1906. Anyway, they had a large hall in the club, and Rudolf Rocker used to lecture there. My father would take me along. I always noticed that the hall

was filled with men, very few women and definitely no young people. So I asked my parents about starting a small Sunday school. They agreed. Children used to come to our house in Stepney Green, and we would read poetry and stories. We would sing songs and talk about Anarchism. One of the favourites was "No Master, High or Low", by William Morris. That made a big impression on me. As I said, we lived opposite a synagogue, and the Rabbi used to come out and stand in front of the door. And when the children left he would follow them home and tell their parents they should not allow them to go to this very bad place in Stepney Green. But the children paid no attention, they came anyway. Soon there were more children than we could handle, and the *Arbeter Fraind* group took it over and helped pay expenses. The school then met in the Jubilee Street Club.

Lib Ed: These were the early Sunday schools then Nellie, which you set up as a child. Didn't you open an international modern school at New King's Hall in 1912?

Nellie: Was it 1912? I suppose it was. Yes, you see, the Jubilee Street Club had been running the original school for a few months, and I wanted it to meet more often. It only met on Thursdays and Sundays, you see. Anyway, after the death of Francisco Ferrer I moved a suggestion at Jubilee Street that we have a bigger school. The answer came from Alexander Shapiro that this was unnecessary, and they wouldn't give us the money. So we decide to do it without money. It took some time, but we eventually got it open. So much used to go on there. Sometimes, on a Sunday, our boys would go out and make a circle around the Suffragettes, and defend them from the police.

Lib Ed: The school closed, though, in 1913, didn't it?

Nellie: Well, no, it didn't close. It carried on with young Rudolf Rocker, and Jim and I began a new school on Cambridge Road East.

Lib Ed: That was in 1914?

Nellie: If you say so. Yes, we carried on a school for some older pupils. Of course, we had to hide some of the boys because they didn't want to be conscripted.

Lib Ed: We haven't enough time to go into great detail about how these schools worked, but how would you sum them up?

Nellie: You have to start early with children, very early. It's no use trying to teach them when they have already had other things instilled in them. You have to teach them they are human beings, they have freedom, they have a right to secede from anything they don't want. The schools were all about freedom. Freedom from the upper classes. There was no-one on top, you see. We were all neither leaders, nor followers.



Garland making at the Friday group

With or with outwork

When you pulled your last cracker did you think about the person who made it. Typically she was in her early thirties, with three young children, earning £30 for a thirty-six hour week, and working at home. But now outworkers are beginning to meet together in support groups to develop their own knowledge and skills, and to make this exploitation a thing of the past...

MANY THOUSANDS of people, all over the country, work at home making things like toys, shoes, handbags, clothing, Christmas crackers or typing or packing factory made goods. These are Britain's outworkers. There are estimated to be 10,000 in Leicestershire alone, and they are usually women with young children who are unable to get any other work because of their family circumstances. They are often trapped into accepting extremely small amounts of money for large quantities of work, piecework rates which average 80p an hour are not untypical.

Factory bosses take advantage of these workers in other ways too. On the one hand they deduct tax from their 'employees' wages, on the other they claim their outworkers are self-employed so that they don't have to pay the employers share of National Insurance which give workers sickness and unemployment benefits.

Leicester Outwork Campaign is one of a number of organisations around the country (others are in Greenwich, Lambeth and Birmingham) which aim to help outworkers get a better deal. It gives advice and information to outworkers; provides support and training for groups of

outworkers; explores alternative employment opportunities; researches into women's training and employment; and leads campaigns aimed to make women and communities more aware of the issues involved.

Many of Leicester's outworkers are from the Asian ethnic minorities and this is reflected in the Campaign's publicity and information leaflets. They are all published in both English and Gujarati, and some are also in Punjabi and Bengali. The Asian community is, unfortunately, a target for racial harassment and the noise from outworker's home machines has sometimes provided the excuse for a racist attack by a neighbour. The Campaign has taken on this kind of problem, as well.

A support group of twenty outworkers and hosiery trainees and ex-trainees plus two Campaign staff, Dhanu Sisodiya and Eva Sitaram-Booth, meet every Friday. In the past year they have explored Health and Safety issues both in terms of the home working environment, such as working with solvents and electricity, and also the factory environment, where they may later find jobs. An Asian woman shop-steward visited the group to talk about trade unionism and some of them joined the

National Knitwear and Hosiery Workers Union: "Everyone thinks of the word strike, but it's the opposite - you can negotiate when you have a union", commented one new member.

A doctor attended another session, she discussed smear testing and other health issues. Other Fridays have involved sessions on diet, exercise, dental care, children and safety at home, and welfare rights: "So many women don't know about benefits", says Eva.

The group has taken up some traditional skills, such as Mendhi, Indian plate decorating, garland making and catering which not only build up the women's confidence, but can also be developed to provide income. Job-hunting and interview techniques have taken their place at the meetings, which more and more have been organised and conducted by the women themselves.

Eva sums up: "For a lot of women, outwork means extra money, money for essentials quite a lot of the time. The support group is a place where they can come out of their shells, they can see how the outside world is and begin to fight for their rights."

Labelled for life

Special Needs is a term that has been in use since 1978 when the Warnock report was published. From the point of view of the children, Warnock may have been a fairly good thing. The report tried to present Special Education as being an enabling variant of normal education. But we have to ask what is special education really about, and what motivates it?

SPECIAL EDUCATION means a variety of things. It means referral, assessment and some sort of recommendation for special treatment. This treatment can comprise a wide range of alternatives, such as extra attention from an ancillary or travelling teacher for some of the time. It can mean withdrawal from some lessons, or placement in a special unit in an ordinary school, or in a special school, or even in a residential school, far away from the child's own area. Warnock thought that one child in five should have provision made for "special educational needs".

Children can be referred at almost any time by a variety of people. Generally those with profound, sensory and physical disabilities are referred by doctors and health visitors early in life. Once this happens parents are visited by a tidal wave of different types of social workers, therapists and pre-school teachers from different agencies.

There is sometimes rivalry between these agencies. Credibility comes from having a large caseload and needing extra staff to meet the increasing and expanding demands being made on your team. It may seem as if special education is motivated by benevolent humanitarianism. Sometimes it is. But just as some children and parents need the professionals, the professionals need the children to justify their existence.

At around school age another wave of referrals start. But now it tends to include more children referred for 'educational' reasons rather than primarily medical reasons. Some are referred because they are making slow progress at the objectives chosen by the school system, sometimes because they are not getting on well with teachers and pupils, do not speak much, or are 'disruptive'.

These children are then assessed by Educational Psychologists who have to decide what to do. They may propose a Formal Statement of Special Educational Need, if the child seems to have special needs which the school claims it cannot cope with from its own resources.

Assessment is riddled with problems. Firstly the assessor has to try to find out if there is a Special Need (it used to be called handicap). They try to gauge its extent and work out a suitable method of 'treatment'. Although it may be possible to do the first task, the big problem is that the elements of both treatment and prediction are dubious in the extreme.

Assessment tools are variable in their results. They often produce warped estimates of what a child can do because of the context in which they are administered. Intelligence testing is still widely used. Surely enough has been written about its dubious validity.

'Normality'

Development and social competence scales give the assessor the opportunity to compare a child against a 'norm'. While these can be useful in telling whether a child has a gross problem, they become of less use when trying to find out more about a child. They may tell you no more than how the child reacts under test conditions, or about the opportunities for particular activities at home. For instance, if a child will not make a circular motion with a pencil, it could well be that the child has never used a pencil, rather than being incapable of the activity.

Diagnosis and treatment often go together, even though, according to the rhetoric of special needs, they should not. A child is stated to have adjustment

problems, and goes to a maladjusted school, or is stated to have Severe Learning Difficulties, and goes to a SLD school. The existence of these specialist institutions for various forms of disability sets up a pressure on the institution to have its places filled.

Ray Wolfe (in *Special Education: Policy, Practice and Social Issues*, Harper & Row, 1981) looks at the placement of 'maladjusted children' as being a consequence of supply and demand and says "the consequence of an increase in supply is a stimulation of demand. Conversely, if the supply of places is for any reason depressed, demand is reduced accordingly". Some children have been put into maladjusted schools simply on the grounds of persistent truancy! Their reward for rejecting a system that is obnoxious is to be locked away.

A further problem with the placing of children in a special school is that the stigma can cling to that person for the rest of their lives. A recent television programme claimed to be about two 'mentally handicapped' adults who had a child. The programme never challenged the idea that the two walking, fluent talking people, who were the subjects of this programme, were mentally handicapped in the first place. They had been labelled and sent to institutions for mental handicap from an early age - this was all the evidence offered in justification of the label.

Perhaps there are glimmerings of light. An attempt is being made to look at children as individuals. However, the system is failing to cope with this demand since it does not have the resources to look at individuals.

And then, of course, there is integration into mainstream schools, which many children with sensory and physical disabilities seem to be desperate for. But schools are not exactly progressive institutions. In addition, the problem as to how society should adapt to take those with disabilities properly into account, let alone adapting the schools, has scarcely been tackled.

From our own correspondents

Insularity is an unfortunate English characteristic, so the *Lib Ed* collective have always felt that it is important not to be trapped into seeing England as the centre of our educational universe. However, the fame of Summerhill and Neill has made Britain a focal point for many peoples aspirations for truly liberated learning. We have many foreign subscribers and are in regular correspondence with several groups abroad. Because these movements are often quite small, fragmented or repressed, it is often difficult for them to spread knowledge of their existence, and their efforts to bring about freedom for children today and in a world community.

Lib Ed has always been an outward looking magazine, and articles about education in overseas countries appeared in *Lib Ed* as early as 1968. We continue to think that the forging and strengthening of international links is of the utmost importance.

Variations in anarchist and libertarian ideas in education are apparent, around the world as well as within this country, and so debate is important for the maintenance of healthy and active international movement.

(A list of articles about libertarian educational issues in countries other than Britain will be sent if you send us a S.A.E.)



Nought for behaviour

IN SEPTEMBER 1982, three teachers in a nursery school in Paris decided to change the way they were teaching. After a year of preparing their ideas they put their "decloisonnement" (opening up) into practice.

The bulletin *Zero de Conduite* (Nought for Behaviour) was launched in November 1983. Now a monthly, it spreads libertarian ideas about education, and the social and political role of schools. At its inception it was based around children and teaching; it grew quickly to look at other areas of relevance to education, notably union struggles, experiences in higher education, and apprenticeships in France.

Another big step was the opening, in February 1985, of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Innovation Sociale et Educative (*Le CERISE*). This centre contains a library, mainly of books on education, and serves as a meeting ground for several movements of anti-hierarchical teachers, both regional and national.

The growth of the editorial collective of the bulletin has allowed a more in-depth coverage of the different levels of education in France. This has resulted in a more

Tamariki

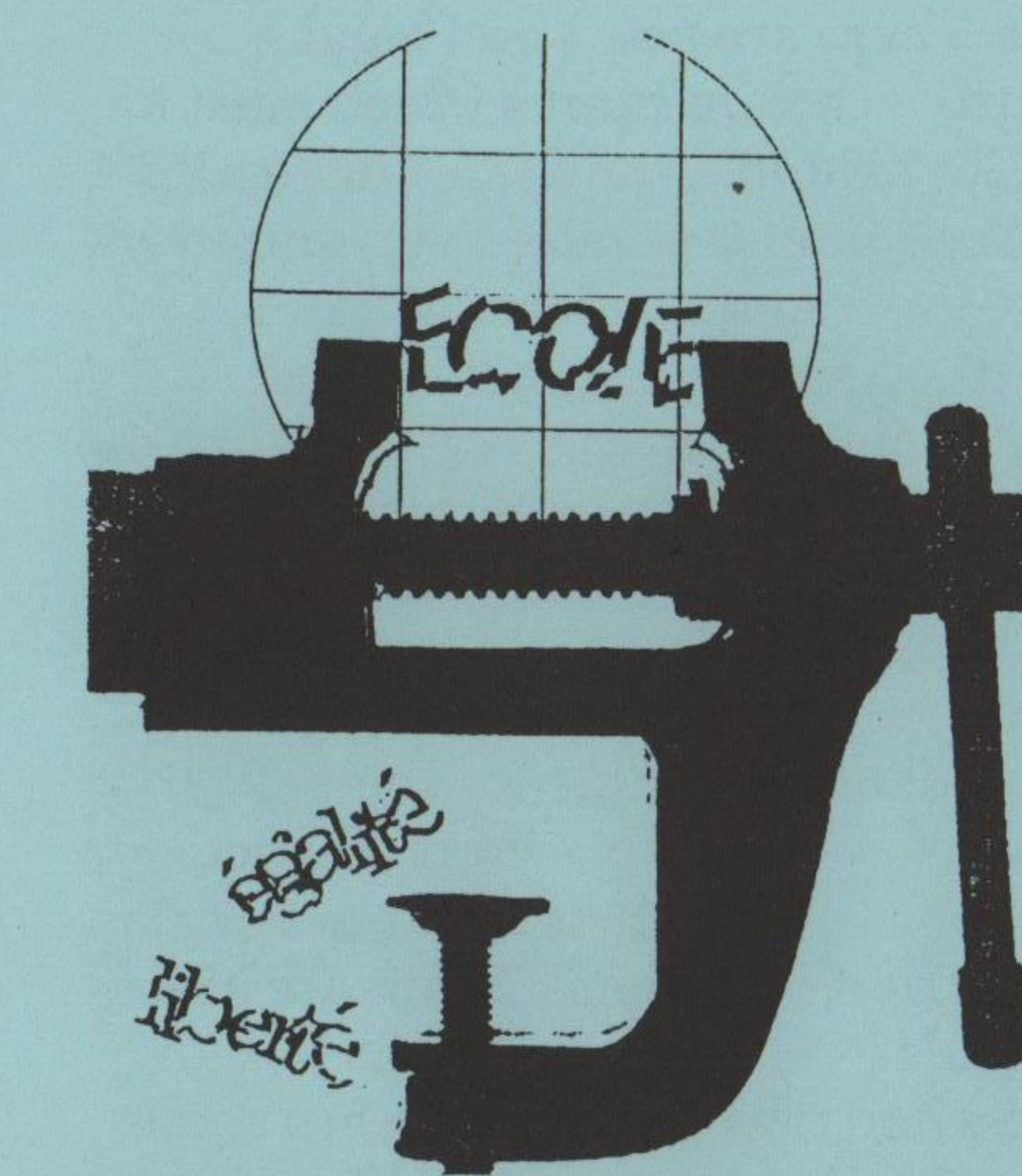
ONE OF THE FEW remaining alternative schools in New Zealand is in danger of closure. Tamariki school was established in Christchurch twenty years ago and there are now 30 children there, aged from four to 14. Its philosophy has been greatly influenced by Summerhill, for instance there are no compulsory classes.

Tamariki has been funded by fees, which have been kept very low, fund-raising and a government grant. This grant has now been cut in half and income no longer matches expenditure.

Nicaragua

READERS WILL remember from *Lib Ed* 4 that Nicaragua has established a system of local learning co-ordinators who help the people in their areas enable their own learning.

This system, according to recent Nicaraguan visitors to Britain, is still working well in spite of the pressures of the war against the contras and the lack of resources.



thoroughly researched magazine. For example the next issue will contain an analysis of teacher training in France. *Le CERISE* plays an important role for people who want to co-ordinate activities and intervene in education. International links, that *Le CERISE* and *Zero de Conduite* would like to extend, can only reinforce ideas for the application of an alternative to state, private or religious-based education.



Facing the facts

BEFORE FRANCO won the Civil War, back in 1939, the Spanish anarchist movement and its supporters had managed to set up two to three hundred schools (school age being 3 to 14 years old) all over Spain. A hundred of them were in Catalonia alone. These schools pioneered child-centred education, the dropping of punishment/reward systems, open-air teaching, self-teaching through direct experience, co-education, and non-hierarchical school management. In the latter the administration was the work of a teacher voted for by the staff every six months who had to abide by their decisions.

The pre-war libertarian schools were set up exclusively to help working-class children who would not otherwise have gone to school). Religious education was abolished and sex education introduced. For the first time in European history, teaching dedicated to "the self-development of the free and fully-autonomous individual" (to quote one of the founders of the movement, Francisco Ferrer) took place on a large scale. All this was achieved between 1901 and 1939.

Backing from the CNT

It was financed largely from the union dues of, and sited on premises supplied by, the two million strong anarcho-syndicalist labour union, the CNT. In 1976, when Franco finally died, the CNT re-organised, and by 1978 had just under a quarter of a million affiliates. The teachers section was large, and they made a tentative step in the direction of their predecessors by setting up a chain of infant schools in Catalonia.

However, a year later they came up against several problems: police prosecution following the framed-up bombing of a Barcelona night-club; a split in the CNT (possibly engineered); and a general loss of interest in things political



State education for those who can't afford private education has finally become a reality in Spain. Most working-class children go to state schools as a matter of course, and any educational improvements for them must take this new situation into account. There are now strict legal 'standards' - certain exams which must be passed, for example - and this once again makes the current situation very different from the pre-war one, in which no such standards existed and schools did not therefore 'compete' in the way that they do now. Parents nowadays are less willing to 'take a chance', preferring what they know to what they don't.

Fundamentally there are simply not enough affiliates to influence the educational system. Activity is restricted to basic union issues such as strike action for better pay and conditions. There are also now two CNTs - supposedly - which is an obstacle when trying to put forward some kind of general programme for libertarian education. Altogether this means that libertarian alternatives are *not* going to emerge as a foil to an obviously reactionary, antiquated and Dickensian educational system.

Regular bulletins

Despite this, the CNT teachers are not losing sight of their aims, and regularly publish bulletins outlining their ideas. A

recent issue was on child development, for example. It stressed how group work should be encouraged instead of work which intensifies individual competition and how schools should be encouraged to be involved with their community, with the participation of both parents and children.

It also emphasised how mutual respect should be encouraged amongst all students, especially respect for individual idiosyncrasies and independent thinking. However, this kind of leaflet has little influence outside of "keeping the ideas alive" and the only effective work the CNT can do is in the area of teachers rights. An example was a strike in late December 1986, which successfully stopped teachers at several Barcelona schools from being forced to work on public holidays.

Libertarian ideas

There is only *one* school in Barcelona run on libertarian lines, and that is small and exclusive (7 teachers). Of the other schools which have incorporated libertarian ideas, most are private. Some state schools, for instance in the industrial belt of Sant Adria, have adopted these ideas, and state education is not the abysmal mess it was under Franco.

Not all libertarian education in Spain is the exclusive work of the CNT teachers section. This private school in Barcelona, for example, or the informal adult evening classes run by the Libertarian Athenaeums are not. However, the CNT keeps in touch with all experimental groups and sympathetic organisations, and represents the largest single organised group of libertarian teachers in the country. They have asked for more contacts abroad, to exchange ideas, to receive news of current projects, and to sound out the possibilities for setting up an international federation for libertarian learning. They have translators for French, English and Italian.

Labour learns from Thatcher

MANY PEOPLE attending a recent Primary Teachers conference in Auckland were shocked at the message coming from the New Zealand Prime Minister and Minister for Education, David Lange.

Gone was the concept of giving pupils a well-rounded education to fit them for a well-rounded life. In its place was a one-sided emphasis on maths and science: more what you would expect from a right wing politician than a newly re-elected Labour PM.

Other familiar divide-and-rule policies suggested by Mr Lange were differential pay according to skill, merit pay and contractual employment. Where did he pick these little ideas up?

But these should not have come as much

SWEDISH EDUCATION has been extremely monolithic ever since the general school system was introduced in the middle of the 19th century, in order to keep the dissenters from reading the Bible in a way the government didn't want. This tendency to uniformity goes back even further, to the age of the Reformation, when the state and the church became integrated.

The Labour Movement, the most important political force in Sweden, didn't change the centralism of the school. The Social Democrats strengthened it as a means towards equality in education. In the early 60s nine years of schooling for all became compulsory. Educational ideals slowly transformed to a more technological perspective, with an emphasis on so-called 'useful knowledge'. The general tendency, both before and after the reform, was rather authoritarian, in spite of some progressive experiments in the 30s.

Study circles

Connected to the Labour Movement is one of the most successful and best organised movements in the world. This movement has been organised by autonomous educational associations, mostly in the form of "study circles" - an egalitarian and non-authoritarian form of self-education. These study circles have no general curriculum and are formed to answer the needs and interests of the members. This form of study has now degenerated into a harmless hobby activity.

Another specifically Scandinavian form of adult education is the Folk High School, also without a central curriculum and characterised by the ideology of the Labour Movement or the Dissenter Churches. These schools have been very influential in the past, but have tended to lose importance as general education improves -

surprise to the conference for the Labour government had recently passed a reactionary Education Act. This Act includes a requirement that any secondary teacher charged with any offence whatsoever to notify his or her school board of the nature of the charge without delay. Failure to do so will constitute a disciplinary offence under the Act. And the board has the power to dismiss, transfer, censure and/or fine a teacher.

The Labour government's free market experiment has been ripping up the future of young school leavers. The unemployment rate is around 10%, with some regions having up to 25% out of work. It's safe to say that New Zealand is in for another three years of hard Labour.

Few freedoms

nowadays more than 90% of the youth attend school for more than nine years.

Waldorf and Freinet

In general, state schools have not been very libertarian, and there have been almost no alternatives. There are a few private schools for the children of rich people, but not to the same extent as in Britain. None of these schools has been prominent as far as libertarian education is concerned. The only schools with an alternative pedagogy are the Waldorf Schools, distinguished by the anthroposophic ideas of Rudolf Steiner. But a few teachers in the state school system employ the methods of Freinet.

In the early 70s some leftist progressive and libertarian tendencies made their way into the schools. The result was the creation of a myth. The myth said that young teachers just played with children, and tried to make them communists, while they neglected serious studies and basic skills. This picture wasn't true of most schools or teachers. The myth, however, created a strong backlash, much stronger than the tendencies it was a reaction against.

Backlash

The backlash included a condemnation of all forms of libertarianism, development psychology, and political consciousness-raising. The watch-word was "Back to Basics". The one basic idea of educational method was discipline, order and authority. An interesting fact about this movement was that it consisted of an unholy alliance between ordinary reactionaries and former marxists.



The trade unions have mostly played the role of defenders of a very narrow concept of teachers' interests. They have no overall idea of educational ideals and methods. This is not surprising considering that most of the teachers have a middle-class-orientated world view. A few teachers, however, unhappy with the narrow views of the big unions, have joined the syndicalist movement, forming the Federation of Educational Workers (Utbildningsfederationen av SAC), with about 400 members, both teachers and students.

Mouthpiece

The progressive teachers have had a mouthpiece in the KRUT (Kritisk UtbildningsTidskrift - Critical Journal of Education) founded in the mid-70s. KRUT has introduced radical ideas and theoretical analyses from abroad, and initiated the most serious debates about the Swedish school system. Important themes have been, for example, "The hidden curriculum", "Freinet's educational ideas", "Youth culture", "Libertarian education" and "Free schools".

However, there is potential for radical teachers within the state school system. The national curriculum in Sweden consists of two parts. The first conveys the ideals of education discussing, for example, the individual development of the child, taking a firm stand against racism and sexism and for democracy. The second part expands on the ways in which these ideas could be furthered in rather traditional educational terms. The curriculum affects the writers of school books, who tend to be anxiously 'neutral'. But only the first part of the curriculum - the so-called "poetry part" - is compulsory, which offers very interesting opportunities for libertarian teachers.

Ragnar Ohlsson and Bosse Talerud.

Nepal

AN INTERESTING SMALL school is being set up near Kathmandu in Nepal. The school intends to educate forty infants, aged three to seven, from homes in the local area. The children will be provided with a nursery kindergarten environment, with a spacious playground, field, garden, classroom, drawing facilities, toy workshop and free access to first aid. At the same time it is establishing a vegetable farm, a carpentry workshop and a library.

The school's proposal says: "The problem of unnecessary competition and its struggles and sorrows in infants has been the result of overdoings of teachers and parents. The teacher has no right at all to force infants to do anything."



throughout Spain, "the disenchantment" as some people have dubbed it. Membership dropped accordingly and the infant schools became impossible to maintain. However, in 1980, the teachers section joined the graphic arts section and the Regional Federation in an experiment to set up a school for adult evening classes, running courses on, for example, photography, drawing and painting. Although successful, this project lasted only a few months.

Colonies learn rules OK

An interview with a SE Asian journalist and writer



Lib Ed: *Is there a libertarian education in South East Asia?*

BN: Probably not, because the idea of libertarian education is based very much in industrial society. However, there are critics of the traditional system - even in Government. There are many people who disagree with the system, which is highly exam orientated. These are few, because in order to go to university you need eight or nine O levels, A levels, and to be at least bi-lingual - in your own language and English. University graduates have then internalised the system very thoroughly.

On the other hand the traditional schools that came with the colonial age were also the export of an industrial society. Before that every culture in SE Asia had its own system; it is incorrect to say that education began with the colonial type of schooling.

One major problem is that every country wants, whether we like it or not, to be industrialised. This means that there is a perceived need by Governments and the middle classes for Western-style schooling to fulfil the needs for the Western professions. At one level you have professional middle classes with social prestige - doctors and lawyers - and then you have the technicians and other skilled workers who satisfy the needs of industry. You also have industrialists and entrepreneurs who are the same all over the world in capitalist societies. They perceive an obvious need for Western-style schooling and what follows from it.

If the developing countries wish to retain their cultural autonomy and political independence, they will need to give more priority to indigenous forms of learning.

They are in the damaging state of mind, thinking that pre-colonial forms of learning are inferior.

Lib Ed: *What happens to drop outs from the system?*

BN: The drop outs contribute to the unemployment figures and undergo frustration. In fact, people who dissent from the education system are not organised at all. They drift to lower paid jobs. They form a dissatisfied class in society, but they do not feel confident enough to fight back because they have been made to feel inferior through not getting good grades.

There are groups of dissidents all over South East Asia, but education does not seem to be the main issue for them. Dissident groups focus almost exclusively on the political failings of the government of the day, or on the welfare of the workers. I think that many of these groups can only flit from one single issue campaign to another, and so far education does not seem to have been one of them.

Lib Ed: *What is the nature of state schooling in Malaysia?*

BN: Malaysia is a culturally mixed society, and traditionally each ethnic group had its own form of schooling. There are Malay, Chinese and Tamil schools, in addition to English language schools. The vernacular, used in the various schools, helps to propagate community culture, as opposed to British culture. But the argument over cultural diversity in the educational sphere has been reduced to arguments over which language should be the medium of instruction in schools. The government has

a policy of turning all vernacular schools into Malay-medium schools. As a result the champions of each community are up in arms over what they see as an erosion of their cultural identity.

The emphasis is on formally structured lessons. There is a standard syllabus for the whole country. All children must achieve the same grades; it is an exercise in regimentation that is seen as necessary by the government as necessary for industrial modernisation.

The ends are to create people to fill the jobs in an industrial society. The system is like that in Britain, but more regimented and standardised; and everybody places greater emphasis on exam results.

The resources available are few, but computers are used in urban schools. There are a few liberal corners, such as a project on newspapers, in collaboration with the editorial team of a real paper.

The private sector is now more under the government umbrella. Private schools have to be approved by the Ministry of Education in all matters such as subjects offered, medium of instruction and exams taken.

Lib Ed: *What about child labour?*

BN: The villages in Malaysia face a steady depopulation, as young people drift to the cities. People are not content to till the land, but move to the town where they go to low paid service industries. The government, in fact, provides sites and loans for the incomers to get small businesses going. However, the non-Malay urban population see this as favouritism for the Malays, who form the bulk of the rural population. It is worth noting that there are few areas of Malaysia not subject to Western influence and education - even the remote villages of Borneo.

Lib Ed: *And what about other countries?*

BN: In the Philippines you find the nearest approach to a libertarian style of education in the areas controlled by the communist-led New Peoples Army (NPA). The Philippines is the only Christian country in South East Asia - and the NPA run classes based on the ideas of Freire and liberation theology. While the organisation of the NPA/National Democratic Front remains underground, its classes depend on goodwill and self-management.

In Thailand - a country known for its Buddhist philosophy - alternatives can meet with rough treatment. A few people belonging to a Muslim group set up a fundamentalist Muslim school in one of the poorest villages in the country. When there was a confrontation with the police the locals were fired upon and twelve people died. The point is that people were so poor that they felt they had nothing more to lose - so they tried to take an alternative route.

Libertarian education as such may not exist in South East Asia, but there are individuals and groups who are dissatisfied with the present systems - and who, one day, will have their chance.

Declaring independence

A squatter explains how, when she left home aged fifteen three years ago, there was no alternative to squatted accommodation. Today the situation is little different: welfare organisations still make their priority the return of runaways to their families, or back into care, rather than allowing the young people the right to decide for themselves where and with whom to live.

1987 WAS International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. But in that year Hackney council decided to evict the thousand or so squatters living in their previously empty, sub-standard properties. These properties had been left unattended for years to provide an excuse for selling them off to developers, while homeless families have been put in bed and breakfast accommodation.

'Youth Month', in October, meant that lots of little yellow posters appeared. These told me: that when young people leave home, there is no housing for them; all (young people) are denied the independence that a home of your own brings; the situation is even more acute for young people leaving residential care; discrimination and harassment are the everyday experience of young black people looking for accommodation, and for young lesbian and gay men who are often forced to leave home by their parents reaction to their sexuality; many young women are denied the right to live independently, as they are expected to remain at home or only to leave to get married; in public rented housing, most authorities stop young people from signing on the waiting list; the rapid decline in private rented housing has meant that young people are competing more and more with better paid adults; low wages and growing youth unemployment deny young people the ability to leave home and find their own accommodation; young people have no rights to housing when homeless.

Shelter

All of which is indeed very true. And so there exist lots of very nice voluntary organisations (like Centerpoint, Soho Project, Stopover in Manchester, Handsworth Single Homeless in Birmingham) which help to shelter homeless young people in warm, safe hostels... *so long as these young people are over sixteen*. And if not? But people under 16, they shouldn't be leaving home! For starters, it's not strictly legal. And, of course, they should be in school! They should be cared for and controlled by their parents!

Abuse

ABUSE, SEXUAL ABUSE, VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION, DEGRADATION, CONTROL, FEAR... these are the reasons why so many people under sixteen (and over, of course) run away from home. Young people, either

bored to the edge of insanity or abused by their parents, aren't thinking about the fact that there is nowhere for them to go when they leave, or that they will be denied any form of social security because of their age, that it will be difficult for them to find work, or that if they do apply to any of the temporary shelters they will be put in contact with the police and social authorities quicker than they can lie about their age. They'll probably end up in care (and if they run away again, in a lock-up like Orchard Lodge in South London, locked into their room at night). Or, of course, they'll end up in something like prostitution or drug pushing.

Runaways

The Central London Teenage Project was established, in May 1985, to provide a 'safe house' for young people who had run away from parents or institutions. But when young people are admitted to the project, police, parents and social workers are all informed. One of the aims of the project is: "To return the young person to his/her home area or alternative placement as quickly and effectively as possible."

They also say: "Given intervention at the point of crisis ... families will survive by and large intact." A worker in a Soho advice centre said to me: "The project is committed to getting children safely back to the parents where they belong, or else into care where we can keep a strict eye on them." An organisation which is already somewhat in breach of the law by harbouring runaways won't go out of its way to create alternatives to the golden family and the strict and oppressive institute of 'care'.

Divorce

Children are able to apply for a divorce from their parents in Australia and similar legislation is being contemplated in Sweden. But here the family is such a sacred thing. Why? The majority of child abuse happens in the home yet it is illegal for a child to leave. Why are children who choose to leave home when the family becomes too much for them treated as criminals and placed under lock and key? Young people have no rights as to where and with whom they want to live. It's important to reject the farcical laws and social practices, which say young people can't decide things, and support young people who are forced to take action for themselves.

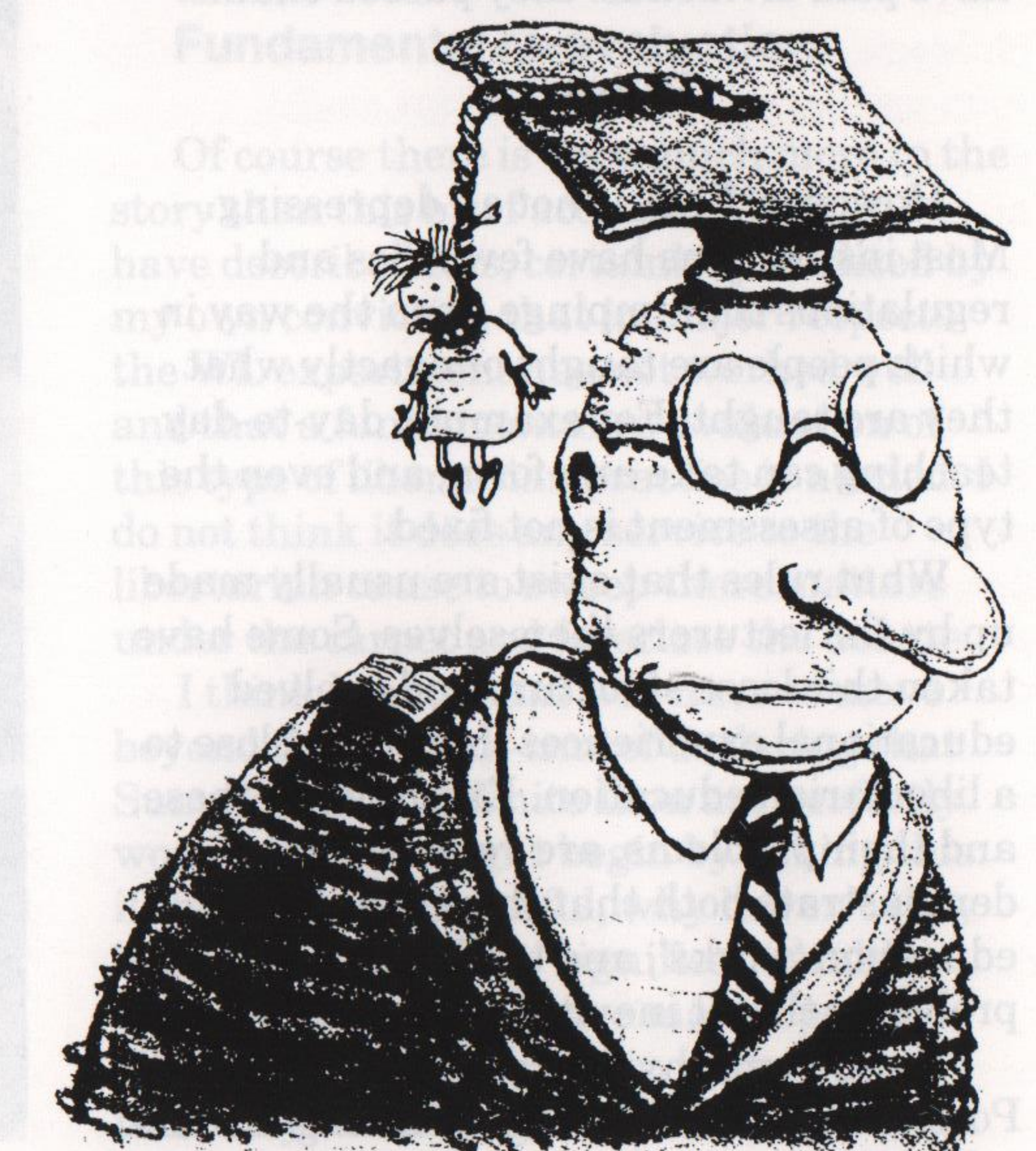
This is where the first part of the article

fits in. Many people are prejudiced against squatters, who are portrayed as vandals, hooligans and leeches in order to cover up the inexcusable fact that tens of thousands of properties are left empty while people are forced to live in cramped B&B or on the streets. They think that squatters get something for nothing. But squatters are ordinary people who just happen to think that housing is everyone's right and are prepared to show up the inadequacy of council policy by housing themselves.

Rights

When I left home, the chance of my finding decent housing was slim. In fact, I probably wouldn't have left home at all if I couldn't have squatted. There was no way I would have approached somewhere like the Central London Teenage Project knowing they would have me placed in a foster family, in care or whatever. I wanted to be independent and to avoid the pressures of social workers and teachers. I didn't want to conform to their nice ideas of nice fifteen year old girls going nicely to school and learning how to suppress their ideas and personalities.

As children's rights become more of a political issue, organised squatting groups like those in Brixton and Hackney will be able to support runaways and other homeless young people. But that's only a start.



Free degrees

Lib Ed has not really covered Further and Higher Education (FHE) in the past. The reasons for this might be considered fairly self-evident; that it's elitist, or that it's the training ground of the managers and bureaucrats. However, Andy Pratt argues that the educational experience of FHE can potentially be a liberating one.

PERHAPS BECAUSE FHE is not compulsory it has to address the thorny issue of making the process interesting and enjoyable to the learner head on, not as a luxury. This is particularly true in the case of higher degrees and adult education. There is a tacit acknowledgement here that the learners are adults and ought to be treated as equals in the education process.

The conclusion of most traditional educationalists, and even HM Inspectorate in these matters, is that the most successful pattern of education is 'learner-centred', encouraging self-expression and self-motivation. Unfortunately, this practice does not seem to permeate to undergraduate level education - let alone to schools.

Carbon copies

The majority of FHE experiences are carbon copies of the worst sort of school experiences, sometimes resulting in the alienation of both the learner and teacher. The reasons for this may not be so complex. Most lecturers are not trained to teach, and uncertainty or peer group pressure often leads them to simply copy the role-model of the school classroom or university lecture theatre.

Even many so-called radicals fail to make the connection between *what* they are teaching and *how* they are teaching. On top of this there are the learners themselves. Most, fresh from school, are keen to re-produce these "learning" experiences, however bad they may have been, simply because these techniques have paid dividends: they passed exams.

Rules

However, FHE is not all depressing. Most institutions have few rules and regulations that impinge upon the way in which people are taught or exactly what they are taught. For example, day-to-day teaching can take any form, and even the type of assessment is not fixed.

What rules that exist are usually made up by the lecturers themselves. Some have taken this loose structure and evolved educational experiences that come close to a libertarian education. Examples of these, and their problems, are very useful to demonstrate both that this type of education 'works', and to illustrate the problems that it inevitably throws up.

The Geography degree course at Oxford Polytechnic includes an interesting module called "Nature & Environment", devised by David Pepper. A browse through the module guide is heartening. Aims of the

course include: "communication with each other...(to help learners) critically examine their own values and the prevailing values of Western society...(to) be critical and reflective about the course material and the educational process in the Polytechnic."

Courts of enquiry

Unlike most FHE, lectures are not a mainstay of the course. Instead seminars and critical discussions, called "courts of enquiry", can emphasise the negotiability of knowledge. The lectures that take place can also be taped so that they can be listened to again. Apart from the court of enquiry the essay is the main form of expression open to the learner. These are self-assessed.

Learners award themselves a grade and have to justify it in writing. After the tutor

has read this and made their own comments they meet up for a discussion of what grade should be awarded. Finally, exam papers (which form 40% of the total assessment) may be 'seen' 48 hours in advance.

I would not suggest that these examples are the final word in libertarian education. But they do, I think, demonstrate some of the things that can be done, and FHE justifies closer attention by *Lib Ed*. But it is no good just imposing more liberating approaches on learners.

People who have been straight-jacketed, by both schools as institutions and the stultifying methods of learning, need a lot of support to cope with the new-found freedom. This first hurdle, unlearning schooling, can be the hardest and most de-moralising one. It is where people are most likely to give up, when the teacher is most uncertain and the students most hostile.

Other people's experiences and further examples of attempts to address these problems would, I think, be valuable additions to future issues of *Lib Ed*.



At play for life. Play for Life is a voluntary organisation promoting co-operation between parents, educators and toy companies to create life affirming playthings for children. Photo courtesy of Eastern Counties Newspapers Ltd.

Mischief or malice

ON OCTOBER 12th a number of NUT members in Leicestershire mysteriously received photo-copies of two letters written by the Headteacher at Countesthorpe College, Chris Evans, to LEA official, Richard Thompson. These letters appear to provide concrete documentary evidence of an attempt to victimise John Shotton, a teacher at the College and a member of the Lib Ed Collective.

The first letter has the Head confiding: "I'm willing to continue risking encouraging him (John Shotton) to think of doing something else and he's tried in the past to wage NUT campaigns about me." In the second, the Head happily proposes that John is made part of a "random sample" of seconded teachers who are asked to justify the value of their secondment.

This is presumably in order to check up on John Shotton in the hope of catching him out. The letter refers in passing to the "awful magazine" (*Lib Ed*) and "the more awful book that he wants to write". As the Head puts it himself in words that deserve to haunt him for the rest his hopefully

short professional career: "I feel like being mischievous..."

The issue has of course been taken up by the NUT. The Divisional Council has voted to call for the Head's suspension pending disciplinary proceedings against him, and for assurances from the LEA that their officials will not behave this way in the future. The LEA has responded predictably by denying that their official ever replied to the two letters, a claim that not even the most gullible believe. They have tried to confine the dispute to the grievance procedure, a graveyard of unavenged injustices in Leicestershire which has no credibility whatsoever.

John has received support, not only from the union, but also from Countesthorpe students. Over 400 of them signed a petition to the local paper supporting him.

At the time of writing, a conflict of fundamental importance is unfolding. If a Headteacher can get away with such a blatant attempt to victimise a teacher for his trade union activity and educational

beliefs, then no teacher is safe - and this is before the Baker counter-revolution has been implemented. The "Chris Evans affair" is a scandal of national importance. We urge our readers to send messages of support.

Poor law returns

FROM 1989 a new system for claiming Social Security will be put into operation to save the government an estimated £500 million from the Social Security bill. Statistics have been quoted that show that a family at present entitled to £130 per week will have this reduced to £70.

There will be a Social Fund which will make discretionary grants in cases of hardship. However, in order to apply to get money from the fund, people will have to plead, humiliatingly, poverty and disability. There will be no right of appeal if an application for a grant is turned down.

It is estimated that the new reductions will hit children and people with disabilities hardest.

CITY FREE SCHOOL

Lion of Islington

Nigel Wright, a former worker at White Lion Free School, Islington, London, writes in response to Will Langworthy's article in the last issue of Lib Ed.

IT JUST WILL NOT do for Will to portray the recent disagreements at White Lion as a Walt Disney-like battle between good and evil. There has in fact been a legitimate debate going on at WL for several years, and all sides in that debate (there are more than two sides) have valuable viewpoints which deserve serious attention. All of these viewpoints fall within the broad libertarian tradition, and therefore I do not think it would be right for *Lib Ed* to publish only one side of the story.

Vision

Very briefly, the debate can be summarised in this way: when WL was founded in 1972 it described itself as an experiment. The school wrote: "Our vision of the ideal community school is far from realisation - and will quite likely never materialise in the form we envisage. It must be firmly understood by us that we may be entirely taken by surprise by what transpires."

The central question is: how well has the WL experiment worked out? Those who believe that the experiment has worked well naturally conclude that WL should continue in the future along the same lines as in the past. They recommend "more of the same". Those who believe the experiment has not worked well have tried to identify what changes would be needed

to remedy the faults they perceive.

Thus there are two issues here. Has the school worked well? And should there be any major changes in the way the school operates? These issues have been overlaid by a third question: if there are to be any major changes who, if anyone, is entitled to make them? The school's founders? The "stooges" (which is the nearest the school has to a council of management or governing body)? The workers? The parents? The children?

These are important questions. Unfortunately the school has lacked a structure within which such questions can be debated and resolved. Internally the school does have such a structure - the meeting, which is open to parents, children and workers. But this forum excludes the school's founders, the stooges, and various other people - such as myself - who would like to participate in the debate.

Pyrrhic victory

Sadly, and in my view dangerously, the debate has been 'guillotined'. The supporters of the "more of the same" view went to County Hall and prevailed upon the senior ILEA officers to impose their viewpoint on the school by dictat - against the wishes of a majority of the parents and the workers. Subsequently all the workers resigned. For Will Langworthy this is a

'victory'.

If it is such, it is a Pyrrhic one because it has established the precedent that ILEA officers (not the elected members) can make decisions about the internal organisation of the school - something we tried hard to prevent when we drew up the agreements in 1982 which brought WL into the ILEA. One wonders, too, what kind of 'victory' it is for the kids to lose, all of a sudden, all the workers, with whom they had built up valuable relationships.

Fundamental re-evaluation

Of course there is very much more to the story than this brief account. The way I have described it is, certainly, jaundiced by my own conviction that in major respects the WL experiment has not worked well and that a fundamental re-evaluation of this type of libertarian practice is needed. I do not think it does any service to the libertarian cause to sweep these matters under the carpet and foreclose the debate.

I think libertarians will have to move beyond the 'hurrah-ism' of declaring that Summerhill and White Lion are perfectly wonderful. We might begin by asking this: if they are so wonderful, why haven't they been imitated on any significant scale? Could it be that there are many open-minded people who remain unconvinced that they are the right answer? And could there be any evidence to support such scepticism? I think *Lib Ed* readers should be told.

Shamed by history

A History of Racism

A video produced and distributed by the Association for Curriculum Development 60 minutes, £40 (or for a hire charge of £20)

THIS IS A VIDEO about the development of British racism. It also looks at the influence of racism on the curriculum in schools in Britain. In the words of its producers, the hope is that "it will encourage teachers to find out more and equip them and their pupils to fight racism." I showed the video to an all-white class of fourteen-year-old students in a large comprehensive school. Their responses were illuminating.

There is a feeling amongst many teachers that videos are generally a liberating resource. I'm not convinced about this and, in fact, I found that *A History of Racism* held some students attention for only about five minutes. I found myself having to use the pause button an awful lot to explain the factual information and try to recapture students' attention. "How much longer?" was a frequent question.

Granted this could be interpreted as a racist response in itself. Maybe it was boring to many of the students because it was about black people. Certainly I detected a racist hostility from some students who, I'm sure, only stifled a tirade

of racist abuse because the school has an anti-racist policy which all the students were aware of. I would not have shown the video had this not been the case.

Some students found the video informative and valuable. One student commented, "I never realised how black people have just been written out of



Demonstration against the Nationality Bill, as seen on the video

history. It reminded me of a project I did at my last school about how we don't know anything about what children have really thought about their lives in the past!"

One student also indicated that he had never realised that black people were actively encouraged to come to Britain to

work in factories after the second world war. "I thought they just came here on the scrounge," he said. The nature of the material definitely challenged his racism.

Similarly, many of the group were moved to comment on the sections of the video which looked at the way in which the colonies were exploited and plundered of gold, jewels and spices. "You just don't realise what we've been up to around the world in the past," commented one student, and after the video had finished I witnessed a furious argument between two of the students about whether Britain was responsible for poverty in about one third of the globe. "Well I don't give a shit what you think," commented the 'mover' of the suggestion, "I feel ashamed."

A History of Racism raises all the right questions and issues about British racism, but I am unsure about how useful it is to show it to a large group. I certainly feel that it is too long and complicated to show in one session, and I think that a lot of the material is far too complex for many school students to understand.

Overall I felt myself having to really control the class, given its racist nature. In this sense I feel that one can only begin to tackle the issue on an individual basis, or at the most in small groups, given the fact that a large group will frequently feed off its own collective racist strength.

News from Neasden

The Borribles: Across The Dark Metropolis

A book by Michael de Larrabeiti
Piccolo, pp332, £1.95

Wagstaffe the Wind-up Boy

A book by Jan Needle
Andre Deutsch, pp118, £6.95

MICHAEL DE LARRABEITI'S Borrible trilogy are the most exciting works of children's fiction to have appeared for many years. They are, without doubt, classics in the best sense of the word, although whether they will ever be 'officially' accorded such status is most unlikely.

For those who don't yet know, the Borribles are anarchic tribes of inner city Peter Pans, pointed-ear children who never grow up, live by petty theft and squat in derelict buildings across London. They are continually on the run from authority in the shape of the "woolies", the police, who seek to clip their ears so that they will grow up to be decent, hardworking, conforming, nose-to-the-grindstone wage-earners like everyone else: "work, work, work, then, die, die, die."

The first book, *The Borribles*, attempted to revolutionise children's literature by sending an expedition of Borrible Adventurers to Rumbledom Common to assassinate the leadership of the grasping, acquisitive, rat-like Rumbles that lived

there in well-defended underground bunkers. The brutal slaying of the Rumble High Command was a timely act of vandalism against the cosy conventions of much of children's literature.

The second book, *The Borribles Go for Broke*, saw the Adventurers at war with a neo-fascist tribe of Borribles, the Wendles of Wandsworth, and their ruthless leader, Flinthead. Borrible fought Borrible, and brother fought brother, for control of the treasure looted from the Rumbles. The whole Borrible way of life was under threat. The Adventurers only narrowly escaped a miserable death in the mud of the River Wandle.

Now, at last, the third and, so it unfortunately seems, the last Borrible book has appeared, recounting the adventures of Knocker, Napoleon Boot and the rest of the Adventurers as they try to take Sam the Horse across London to safety in Neasden. They are remorselessly pursued by the Metropolitan Police's finest, the Special Borrible Group (SBG), commanded by the obsessive Inspector Sussworth and his disgusting assistant, Sergeant Hanks, who gives a whole new dimension to the word "bogey".

Of course, casting the police in the role of villains in an urban fantasy has inevitable consequences in Thatcher's Britain. In a crude act of censorship *Collins*, the hardback publisher, pulled out at short notice, a development which will

have a serious effect on the book's availability in libraries and has resulted in its going virtually unreviewed.

Nevertheless, this is triumphantly a book for the eighties. It is superbly written, tough, hard-hitting, exciting, funny, and often moving, and successfully turns London, with all of its ugliness and beauty, into a place of high adventure. The Borribles, both boys and girls, are a marvellous creation and their various enemies from the adult world, police, meffos, snatchers, all loom menacingly larger than life. Most highly recommended!

A much slighter, but still very worthwhile, book is Jan Needle's *Wagstaffe the Wind-up Boy*. An entertaining exercise in children's grotesque, the book introduces Wagstaffe, a boy so obnoxious that his parents run away to join the circus. Abandoned, he has a serious accident while playing on the motorway and is so badly injured that most of his body has to be replaced by clockwork (this is Britain after all!). The new improved Wagstaffe emerges to confront the world, presumably with one or more sequels in mind.

Jan Needle is an accomplished writer, and children are likely to find the appalling Wagstaffe irresistible. The book is tastefully illustrated by Roy Bentley; I particularly liked the picture of Wagstaffe being shovelled up from the hard shoulder after his accident.

Why spend money on killing...

Sing for your Life, 44 songs to change the world

A cassette and songbook chosen by Sandra Kerr
A & C Black, £5.95

IT IS NICE to find a book which lives up to its introduction. These are "outspoken songs about important subjects", involving themes with a wide emotional range, taken from different countries and from different times but united in message. They concern issues inherent to life and liberty, matters of love and hate, war and peace, birth and death, creativity and destruction, drudgery and joy.

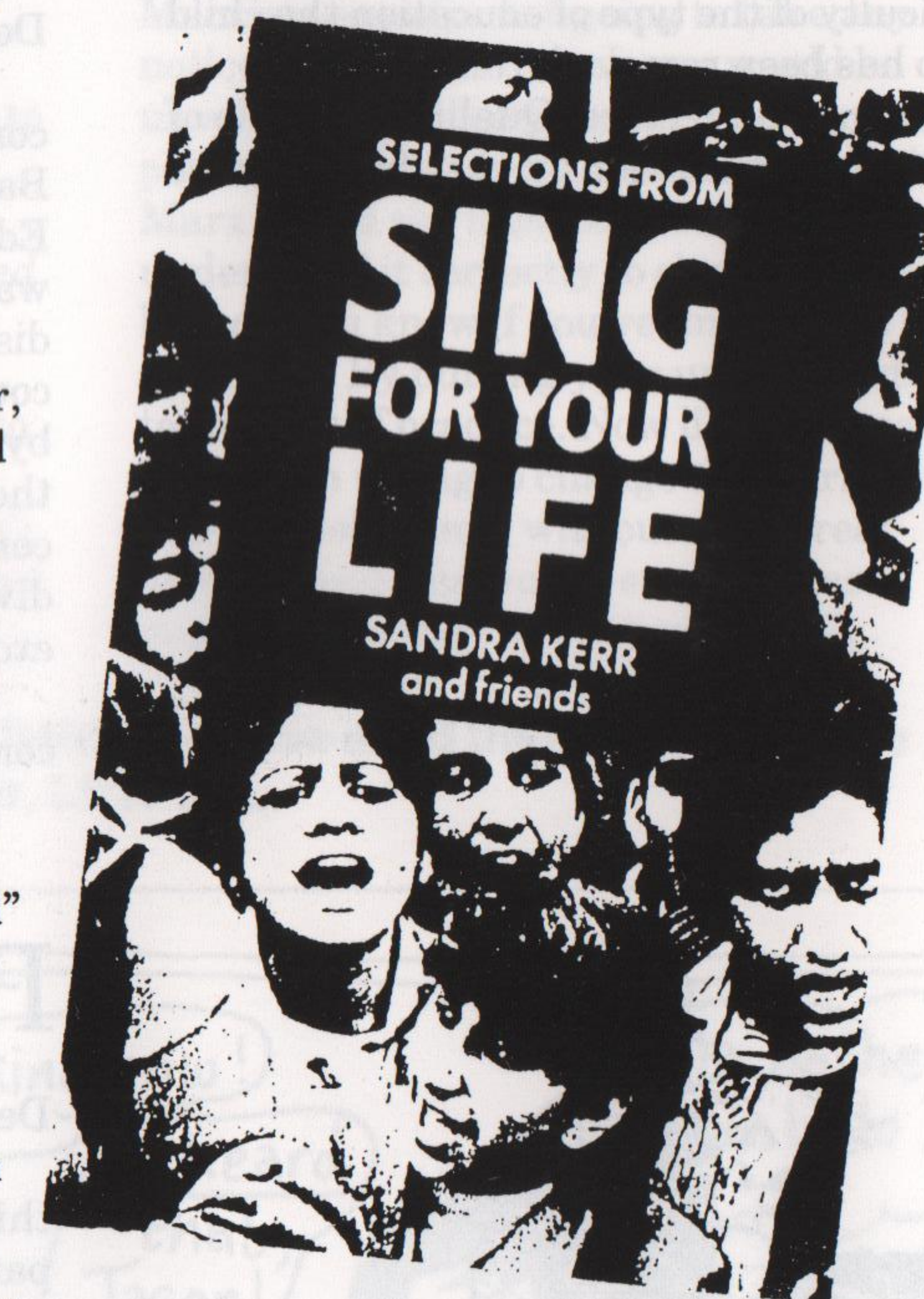
In "The Price" we're asked; "Why spend the money on killing, When its life that we're all here for," whilst a quote from Martin Luther King pinpoints the crux of the issue. The dilemma of 'fighting' for freedom is "the overcoming of oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence".

Historic and contemporary songs of war, the injustice of hierarchical oppression and the stupidity of mindless obedience are juxtaposed with songs about the spread of pollution, the nuclear holocaust, the demoralisation of unemployment and the unequal distribution of wealth, showing the depressing record of human 'achievement'. There are also songs of solidarity, pride in working skills, or the hope and vitality of "We will rise up united" from "Children of Africa".

Altogether this collection of songs is a vital antidote for anybody who's had experience of traditional songbook collections which "Ta Ra Ra for the British Grenadiers". The cassette is a helpful adjunct, providing a useful guide to the presentation of the songs and their musical

possibilities, and while the collection is perhaps of most interest to those involved with secondary school music - some of the harmonies are quite difficult and younger children may not always be equipped to discuss the political nature and appreciate the biting satire of some of the songs - there is something for us all in this collection.

In the words of Birmingham Sunday, "I can't do much more than to sing you a song, I'll sing it so softly, it'll do no one wrong, and the choirs keep singing of freedom," if we want to change the world, unfortunately, we've got to do more than sing about it, but perhaps its a hopeful way to start.



Right on

The Rights of Children

A book edited by Bob Franklin
Basil Blackwell, pp237, £5.95.

ALL THE GOVERNMENT'S current education reforms, proposed in the name of the consumer, leave one group out in the cold. The primary consumers of schooling are not parents, nor employers, but pupils. Legislation that effects youth rarely has youth's approval. How often, indeed, are young people actually consulted about anything?

Bob Franklin's book demonstrates the ways in which a society which purports to care about children in practice often abuses them, discriminates against them and denies them civil rights. The contributors, both academic and professional

practitioners, examine a number of topics, including the rights of children at school and in care, the juvenile justice system, children and the right to work, black children's rights, girls' rights and children's sexual rights. They clarify the difficulties faced by children in living autonomously, showing how adult attitudes and institutional procedures operate against them.

The Rights of Children is an adventurous and challenging re-appraisal of contemporary British society, which calls for a change in attitude and position by older people to youth. The book is unique in bringing together discussions on a wide range of issues, and will be of interest to all those concerned about children and young people.

Shocking Pink

A young woman's magazine
c/o 55 Acre Lane, Brixton, London SW2,
60p

SHOCKING PINK, a magazine produced by young women, has re-emerged after a short time away. Politically describing itself as "somehow Marxist, with shades of anarchy", SP provides an alternative magazine for young women who want to escape from unnatural and trivial obsessions, such as boys, fashion, spots and suntans, that fill the usual 'girls' magazines.

Shocking Pink manages to balance the humour and seriousness of its articles. For example, the first issue covers subjects such as Myths and Truths about Lesbianism, Life without School and, in a more light hearted vein, The Right to Sulk.

Overall, a superb comeback, well put together and packed with information.

The Russian Revolution

Part of a range of educational software produced for the Acorn BBC.
Spartacus Educational, 139 Carden
Avenue, Brighton, BN1 8NH, £10.00

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION program has been devised by John Simkin to be used in conjunction with the book of the same name (Spartacus 0948865 067, 75p). Spartacus are generating source material which involves learners with the historical characters. This program is excellent, giving students a feeling of what it might have been like to be a member of the Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee in Petrograd in 1917. We look forward to similar material on other areas of the Russian Revolution, particularly on the Makhnovist movement and Kronstadt!

Across the divide

A resource pack about poverty in the UK, for use with the 14+ age group.
Child Poverty Action Group, £11.95 + £2 p.
& p.

THIS PACK is a valuable resource for any social science and integrated humanities work. Using a learner-centred approach, it is attractively designed and illustrated and easy to use. Divided into seven units, it goes way beyond the usual victim-centred resources - "What is poverty". Particularly good is the unit "Making the links, breaking the chains", which examines the relationship between poverty, gender and race.

Education Rights Handbook

An advisers' guide to the legal rights of school students
Children's Legal Centre, pp80, £3.50

THIS BOOKLET sets out, in a clear and informative manner, answers to the 116 most common questions raised with the Children's Legal Centre. It is an extremely valuable guide both for school students and anyone else who finds themselves helping young people with their rights.

Freedom and equality

Dear *Lib Ed*,

A true definition of freedom must surely take equality into account if it is to be viable. Freedom ceases to be a *real* freedom if it is obtained at the expense of, or even in spite of, other peoples' continuing oppression. True liberty can only come with equality and vice versa. If this is so (and it seems reasonable), then the 'libertarianism' of the right wing (their professed belief in freedom) is easily shown for what it is - an increase in the freedom of the rich to exploit the rest of society.

Very few of us would agree with these right wing 'libertarian' ideas, and yet they are, in a sense, ideas which promote a form of freedom. Whether this is a desirable form is extremely debatable, and through examination of this problem perhaps we can begin to perceive that 'freedom' on its own, without careful consideration of what exactly we mean by it, can be a dangerous concept to blindly promote.

Surely liberty in education must be viewed in the same light as liberty within

nothing to those who cannot pay and so cannot be seen as a 'free' school in any genuine sense. If we believe in equality as well as freedom we must be wholeheartedly reject the public school system and Summerhill is, unfortunately, little more than a glorified public school.

The magazine *Lib Ed* covers not only Summerhill, but also the organisation "Education Otherwise", for those wishing to educate their children at home. The idea of home education suffers from even worse problems than Summerhill - it not only does nothing for equality, but actively promotes inequality within education. Only families where one parent can afford not to work can educate "otherwise".

This rules out not only the unemployed and low paid, but most one-parent families. On top of this similarity with the Summerhill problem, there is the added difficulty of the type of education the child who has been removed from standard schooling will receive. Quality and style of education will obviously vary from parent



Happy eater

Dear *Lib Ed*,

I was very impressed with how the conference worked (in comparison with the Base Groups at the Human Scale Education Conference). Some workshops I was in had about 30 people and still good discussion took place. The Human Scale lot could learn a lot from this - groups formed by interest in a subject for discussion though all around a common theme of the conference, instead of groups of people with diverse backgrounds. The food too was excellent.

Many thanks to you all for a worthwhile conference.

Best wishes,
Ruth Goffe

Praise

Dear *Lib Ed*,

I feel I must write and tell you how good this issue is. I liked your piece on Steiner, particularly as I have similar reservations, also the article on Maths, in fact I was deeply impressed and have radically changed my view of the magazine. Congratulations! and keep it up!

Yours in peace and co-operation,
Anne, Charmouth, Dorset

Homophobia

Dear *Lib Ed*,

Stop being so uncritical of A S Neill! His writings show quite clearly that he was a first-rate homophobe and he had no understanding of class. I was sent to a school for maladjusted teenagers (Redhill, near Maidstone), which was supposed to have been based on Neill's principles. No doubt Redhill was a quite perverse variant of Summerhill, but Neill's liberal scribbles do lend themselves to authoritarian interpretations. Repression is a liberal error!

Love
Jeff



the rest of society if it is not to be reduced to the level of abstract theorising and experimentation? This means that we must look both at freedom and equality in the education system and try to question whether what we are creating is a true form of liberty.

Summerhill is renowned as *the* free school in the UK, but is it really as 'free' as it seems? The students there can do what they want to do, what they feel happiest doing. They are allowed to develop mentally and socially as they wish to develop, not as is considered the 'norm' and are all treated in the same way. But this equality within the school does not spread outside it. You have to pay to go to Summerhill and not everybody can afford to do that.

It is equal and free for the people there in the same way that what the 'libertarian' right wing advocates is equal and free for those rich enough to exploit it. It offers

to parent, and the fact that the child is not in a repressive school does not ensure that she or he will not be in a repressive home.

The only libertarianism involved in home education is the freedom to opt out of state and public school systems. This is only very rarely (if ever) entirely the child's choice, and is often not his or her decision at all. The freedom then, must lie mainly with how parents want their children taught. Is this "Libertarian Education"?

After all, who is the education for? Not the parents. It is the student who is educated, and the *right* of the student to a fulfilling education should not be decided by either the financial wealth or the views of parents. The only person who should have a say is the individual being educated, and *everybody* should have the same choices open to them.

Yours,
Will Ashon, Leicester.

In need of theory

Dear *Lib Ed*

Lib Ed is 21 years old, and for 19 of those years I've been disappointed by the anti-theory stance of the editors. In your Winter 1987 edition you review Tuula Gordon's book about Countesthorpe *Democracy in One School?* I haven't read that book, but I want to take issue with your reviewer, who writes:

"Unfortunately, after years of research all she has produced is a work of academic Marxist sociology that will be inaccessible to the great majority of teachers, a work that is geared more to the arcane debates that exercise academics than to the concerns of the classroom ... One problem with much academic Marxism is that it is concerned with understanding the world, often in deliberately obscure language, and seems to contribute little to trying to change it."

Now *Lib Ed* is not a Marxist journal, and we must make allowances for that. But, not for the first time, you feel happy to quote (indirectly in this case) Marx's eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach which is:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it."

Some people - *Lib Ed* included - seem to think that Marx intended an opposition between 'interpreting' (or 'understanding') the world, and 'changing' it: as if he wanted to say was "let's stop all this arcane

theorising and get on with changing the world". But this completely misses Marx's point. He would hardly have spent all those years in the British Museum reading room if he thought that 'interpreting the world' was a waste of time.

In fact the key words in the eleventh thesis are *in various ways*. Marx was trying to explain why it is that thousands of philosophers over thousands of years have spent their lives arriving at widely varying conclusions: how come they *still* haven't come up with the answers? And Marx's reply was that the test of a philosophy lies in its power to change the world (this is what the other ten theses on Feuerbach are about). In fact Marx spent a good deal of his life criticising those who attempt to change the world but do so precisely because they haven't interpreted it correctly.

Now you may say "well, we're not Marxists so we're not going to take any notice of this" but I think you would be unwise to do so, because there is a crucial point here: how *do* we change the world? Marx would say that you need to understand it correctly to change it. But how do you know if you've understood it correctly? By putting your understanding to the test of practice. Now libertarians have been trying to change the world for rather a long time, without very great success, and this lack of success does suggest that they haven't yet fully

understood the world.

If this is so, there is a need for more 'philosophising' or, as I would put it, more theory. And while I have no wish to defend 'obscure language' or 'arcane academicism', we have to face the fact that this theory may well be very *difficult* (as, indeed, much of Marx's writing is very difficult). I think it may be a vain hope that there can be found some theory which both explains the world *and* which is very easy for everyone to understand. The more one thinks about education, the more difficult and complex it all becomes.

And the more difficult and complex it becomes, the fewer people there will be who can be bothered to think about it. *Lib Ed*, in its 21 years, has often seemed to deal with this dilemma by saying "Oh well, we won't think about it then." The main trouble with this is that changing the world is *also* a very difficult task, and if we are to baulk at difficulty, then we might as well give up trying to change the world as well as trying to understand it.

This letter so far might be 'too difficult' for many people, and so you may feel that it is unsuitable for publication in *Lib Ed*. My belief is that *Lib Ed* should, at the risk of trying the patience of some of your readers, give a little space in each issue to a discussion of theoretical questions.

Yours truly
Nigel Wright

We're always delighted to get your letters. Please send them to Lib Ed, The Cottage, The Green, Leire, Leicester, LE17 5HL.

