

Groups · Resources

Lib Ed groups

Leicester 0455-209029
Bristol 0272-41380

Association for Curriculum Development

PO Box 563, London N16 8XD.
(An independent teachers network involved in innovative curriculum development, working to combat racism and sexism, challenge propaganda and produce learning materials which promote equality.)

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)

White Lion Free School

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

Kirkdale Free School

c/o 10 Dallas Road, London SE26 6JP
01-699 4938

Anarchist Student

c/o Mr E Grigg, Christchurch College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU
(British student publication)

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.

Education Otherwise

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

Campaign against Military Research on Campus (CAMROC)

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

New Education Directory

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

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

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)

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

Play for Life

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

Riff Raff Poets

c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1

Housmans Mail Order

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

Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement

BM GYM, London WC1N 3XX
01-317 9690

Gay Youth Help Service

37 Rosenthal House, 45 Rushey Green, London SE6 4AR
01-698 2857

Outsiders Club

Box 4ZB, London W1A 4ZB
01-499 0900
(A series of clubs around Britain which aim to help people with disabilities)

Liberation Network of People with Disabilities

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

National Union of Teachers

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

International

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

KRUT (Kritisk UtbildningsTidskrift)

Torpedverkstaden, Skeppsholmen, S111 49 Stockholm
("Critical Journal of Education")

Jiyu No Mori Gakuen

Hanno, Saitama, Japan
(Biggest free school in Japan)

New Zealand Lib Ed Group

c/o Richard Bolstad, 14 Sullivan Avenue, Christchurch 2, New Zealand

LIFeducation Network

PO Mooloah, 24553 Australia
(Education for life, about life, for the whole life)

Edizioni Anarchismo

Casello Postale 61, 95100 Catania, Italy

National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools

RDI Box 378, Glenmore, PA 19343, USA
(215) 458 5138

Free Schule Frankfurt

Vogelweidstrasse 3, Frankfurt, Fed. Rep. of Germany

Foundation of Education with Production

PO Box 20906, Gaborone, Botswana
(Education for social change)

ANKUR

J-21, Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi 110016, India
661473
(Society for alternatives in education)

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
(Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Innovation Sociale et Educative, which publishes the journal, "Zero de Conduite")

Centro Studi Libertari

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

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 Nefliers, 31400 Toulouse, France
tel: 61-52-45-10

Lib ED

Summer '88 50p

Sex in a Sick Society
What kind of future is offered to children?

Peckham Pioneer Project
The story of a radical health centre

Love, sexuality and family values
A lesbian mother describes the changes
in store for her son at school

SPECIAL ISSUE ON HEALTH, SEX AND SEXUALITY



gender
conditioning
CLAUSE 28

AIDS

teen pregnancies
age of conse
homophob



A magazine for the liberation of learning

THE TORY BILLS
Fight back
special
feature

Special listing

Terrence Higgins Trust

01-242 1010 (daily Helpline)
01-831 0330 (Mon-Fri 10-6)
(Help and advice for anybody worried about AIDS)

Pre-school Playgroups Association

61-63 Kings Cross Road, London, WC1X 9LL

Sex Education Forum

National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakely Street, London, EC1V 7QE
01-278 9441
(Information about sex education)

Lesbian and Gay Workers in Education

BM Gayteacher, London, WC1N 3XX

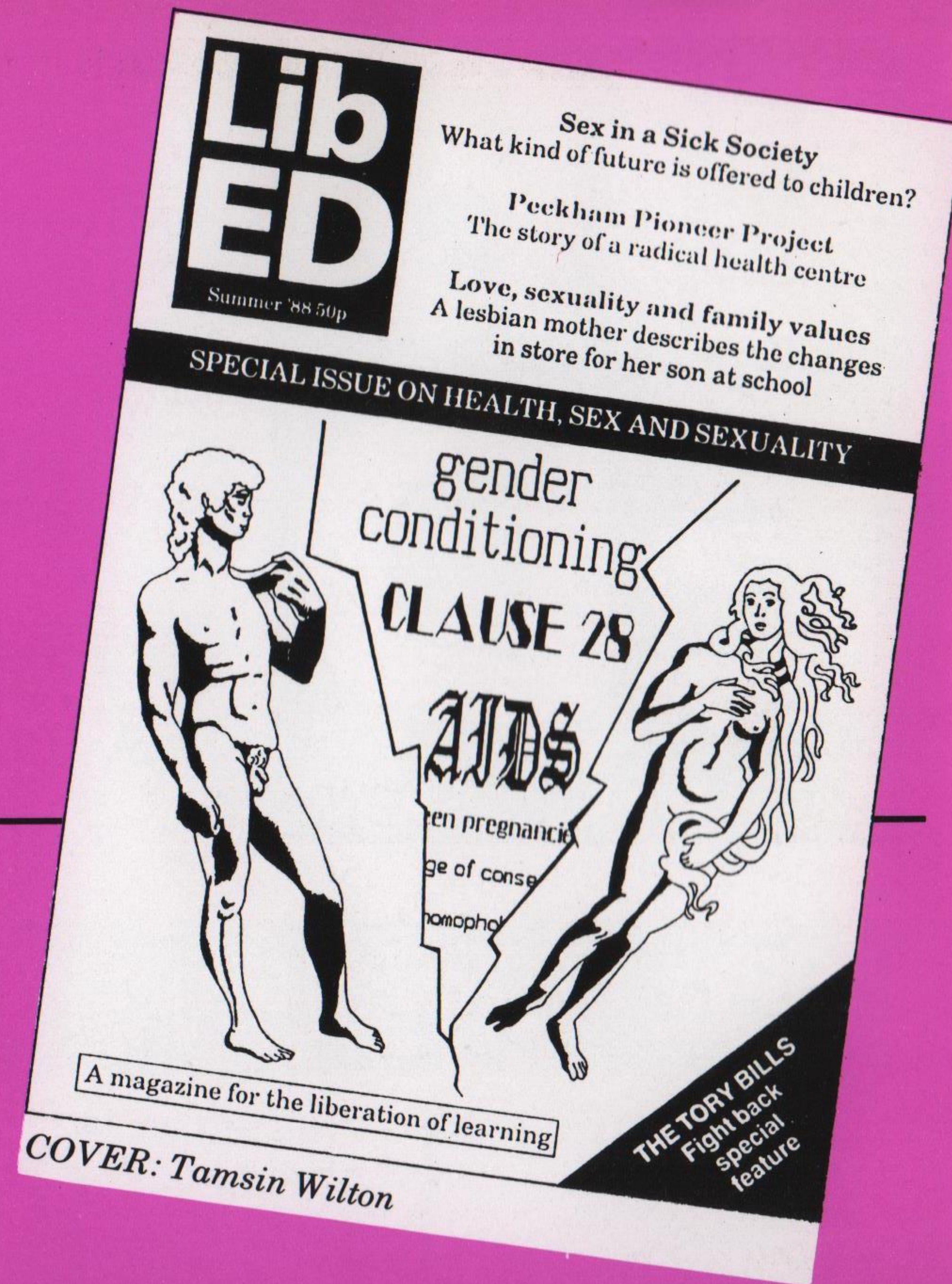
Lesbian and Gay Rights Working Party

City of Leicester Teachers' Association (NUT), 4 Rupert Street, Leicester, LE1

In this issue...

- 3 EDITORIAL
Sex in a sick society
- 4 PIONEERS IN HEALTH
For fifteen years the people of Peckham came together in a unique club, The Pioneer Health Centre
- 6 SAFER SEX
But for whom? The double standards of the Condom Culture
- 7 TELEVISION
How schools' TV programmes have been suppressed
- 8 IN THE CLASSROOM
Love, sexuality and family values
- 9 EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK
The new legislation and how we can respond
- 13 CURRICULUM COP
The dicks dig out the deviants
- 14 LESBIANS & GAYS IN SCHOOL
How some teachers have faced up to bigotry
- 14 THE AGE OF CONSENT
Virtually unenforced - but the law remains
- 15 SEX AND DISABILITY
Tackling the taboos
- 16 REVIEWS
Teenage mothers talk/Sex for beginners/Challenging sexism
- 19 LETTERS
Readers respond to previous issues
- 20 CONTACTS
Including information on groups mentioned in the magazine

PLUS LIBBY, THINK ALOUD, & CRINGE HILL



This issue of *Lib Ed* is an attempt to initiate a discussion of sex and sexuality from a libertarian perspective. Many of the points raised in this issue will be explored in following issues of the magazine, so we urge our readers to inundate us with their views!

In future, further issues of the magazine will be devoted to a single theme, but the next *Lib Ed* will return to the standard format, and will include a four-page special feature on one of the few remaining progressive state schools in Britain.

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!

Sex in a sick society

EVERY DAY millions of people in our so-called 'civilised' society are bombarded by the tabloid press with images of naked or semi-naked women, voyeuristic reports of court proceedings involving sex crimes, and 'news' stories about the sex lives of TV personalities.

Our society is presented as one of 'haves' (money, power, sex appeal) and 'have-nots'. The have-nots, to whom these rags are addressed, are allowed to look but not touch.

Anyone who dares to stray from the path of conformity is branded: striking workers are branded as loonie lefties; people choosing not to hide or be ashamed of their sexuality as perverts; and those who oppose the war industry as cowards and traitors. All proving to the have-nots that they mustn't step out of line, let alone challenge the status-quo.

It's much safer to pep up a drab life of wage slavery or unemployment by reading about fallen vicars and gawking at bare breasts. And, as in nazi Germany, readers are encouraged to blame the shortcomings in our society on the communists, homosexuals and non-aryans (in Britain's case, black people).

The British Conservative government is now introducing legislation to institutionalise this climate of fear and intolerance. Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill is a most striking example, designed to further isolate one set of the scapegoats.

This clause forbids the 'promotion' of homosexuality by publicly funded bodies, and will in effect mean that neither discussion of homosexual relationships nor any portrayal of homosexuals in literature or the arts can be permitted in schools. Claims for the necessity of this clause have included the ridiculous assertion that gays are promoting homosexual relationships as superior to heterosexual ones, with the use in some schools of the book *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* as evidence!

No consideration is given to the self image of the (estimated) 5 to 10 percent of children who will grow up homosexual, nor to the number of children being brought up by gay and lesbian parents. Teachers may often be the only 'independent' adult a child comes into contact with and therefore must be able to discuss all issues of concern to the children and young people that they meet, including sexuality, without fear of reprisals from the school authorities.

The spread of AIDS has been used as further ammunition by reactionary forces in this country. It was first presented as God's curse on homosexuals, bringing to the surface the deep seated fear and suspicion of gays held by many people. Effort towards fighting the disease was, at first, only half-hearted.

The relatively high incidence of AIDS within other minorities (such as the Haitians) did little to hasten the research as none of these groups had particularly high status. At the same time, racists attempted to pinpoint the source of the disease in Africa, implicitly blaming the Afro-Caribbean community.

Only when AIDS started to spread into the heterosexual population were resources diverted into researching and tackling the disease on any scale - and AIDS became God's curse on promiscuity.

The reaction against the so-called permissive society is beginning to stifle discussion of sexual matters - and one of the first targets of the conservatives has been the schools. No longer should sex and sexuality be presented to children and young people, except in purely functional terms and only in the context, if in context at all, of a 'traditional Christian family' setting, and presumably only for procreation. This will mean that AIDS cannot be fully explored in a classroom, something which is necessary for an understanding of the disease and therefore vital for its prevention.



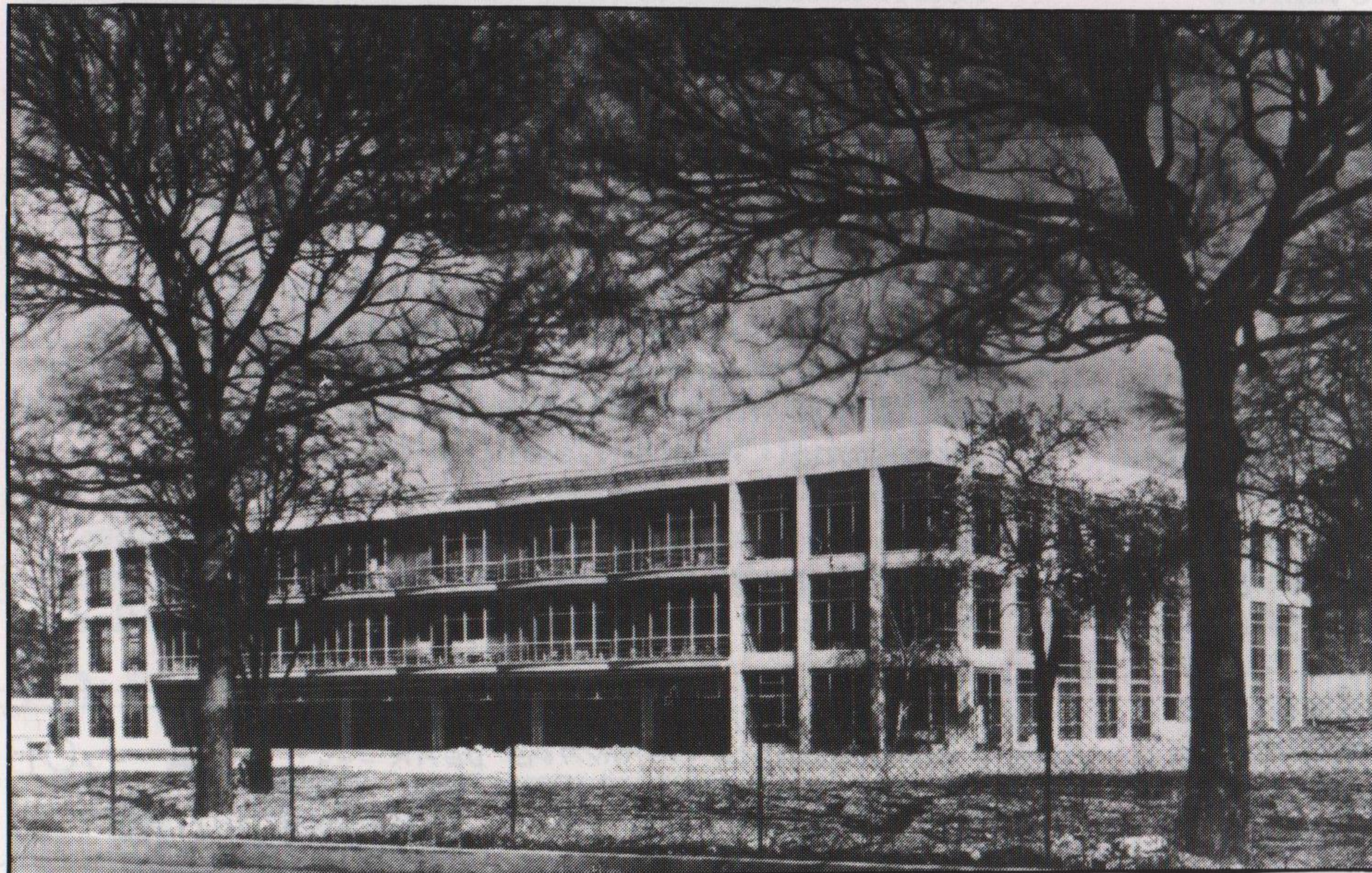
Young people are alienated enough from their schooling without having to put up with an extreme moralistic approach to sex education which describes a society that they would find hard to recognise. *This* society is one in which women are blamed for rape, homosexuals are ridiculed, and children suffer physical, mental and sexual abuse on a frightening scale.

Despite the recent well publicised exposures, little attempt has been made to tackle the root causes of child sexual abuse. Incest is reckoned to occur in 1 in 4 families, the vast majority (over 90%) of victims are girls being abused by an adult male relative or other trusted male family friend.

Incest is a logical consequence of a social system which gives men an excess of power over women, and a family structure which puts power over children in the hands of fathers. Only by a redistribution of this power will there be any chance of eliminating this and other sexual crimes against women and children.

Until that time, all that can be done is to help children resist sexual advances made both by strangers and the adults they know. It is likely to be more difficult in a repressive sexual climate to show children that they have rights over their bodies, and that sexual feelings are something to be enjoyed, not something dirty and to be ashamed of.

Free to do nothing. Free to choose



Set up in 1935, the Peckham Health Centre was a unique experiment in holistic health which lasted (with an interruption for the '39-'45 war) until 1950. Alison Stallibrass has just completed a book on the Health Centre where she worked "as a very junior member of staff". Here she describes the philosophy of education which the Centre developed.

"At the Centre, you learned to do your own thing, and not to resent other people wanting to do their thing... I was ten when we joined. I usually did my homework at home first, and then spent the rest of the evening at the Centre. I spent all the time I could there. My mother used it a lot. I remember she was in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, *Trial by Jury*, that was performed there... I think I did everything there was to do." **JS**

"I remember doing a variety of things - a lot of playing in the gym and in the pool. I can remember five girls of my age with whom I played most evenings and Saturday afternoons when the gym was crowded with boys and girls of all ages. My friends and I played a lot of badminton." **OS**

"After the war I was at a college, but I still used the Centre. I was a member of the Centre Dance band and played water polo. For jazz, I had to go outside for a band... I would never have met and talked to so many different kinds of people anywhere else; there was so much mixing of people." **JS**

"I was twelve when we joined. I had to nag my parents to go along to see the place. They joined for my sake... It was the sheer informality of the whole thing that attracted me. Within reason we could do what we liked. These physical activities let out all the built-up frustrations from school." **HE**

"You knew the children were all right. You didn't worry about them. You could go round there and the children could go there. You might not see them but you knew they were all right." **Mr F**



"Most of our relations lived in the area and it was lovely because we could all meet Saturday night or one night in the week instead of having to go round to each other's houses. My husband earned two pounds nine shillings a week then (1937-8). We paid one shilling a week to belong but it was worth it. Saturday nights we danced up there, and on Monday nights we used to go to learn dancing." **Mrs F**

"There were families round about with children of the same age. They used to call for one another and go off together... We could mix with other families; Children said, 'This is my Mum, this is my Dad'." **Mrs L**

"The Centre was a place that all the family liked to go to." **MR**

"Being a child in the Centre was being part of an extended family." **OS**

These are excerpts from the recollections I have recently recorded of people who lived in Peckham, South London, some forty years ago, and who joined a family club, the Pioneer Health Centre. It is, perhaps, better known as the *Peckham Experiment*, after the book of that name that was written by members of staff during the war when the experiment was temporarily interrupted.

The intention of the two medically-trained biologists who devised and conducted this experiment was scientific rather than charitable. They aimed to test, confirm, modify and elaborate their concept of the environmental conditions necessary for human health. 'Health', to them, meant the full development of a person's potential human powers and individuality.

They held that a healthy person, child or adult, is a growing person - when growth stops, dying begins - and that babies are born with an urge to do what, at any moment, they need to do in order to grow.

They are born with the ability to choose the precise bit of 'nourishment' that is needed at the time by their body of knowledge and knowhow, if it is to develop fully and with satisfaction to themselves. But this ability to choose the right experience and activity only survives if the child's surroundings are suitable for human growth.

At the Centre, nobody selected a child's occupation; nobody asked "What would you like to do?", making the child self-conscious and inhibiting awareness of her or his surroundings and power of spontaneous choice. The children were free to do nothing, or what is often considered to be nothing, such as wandering around and watching others, or sitting and chatting or dreaming. Because they were free to do nothing, they were really free to choose.

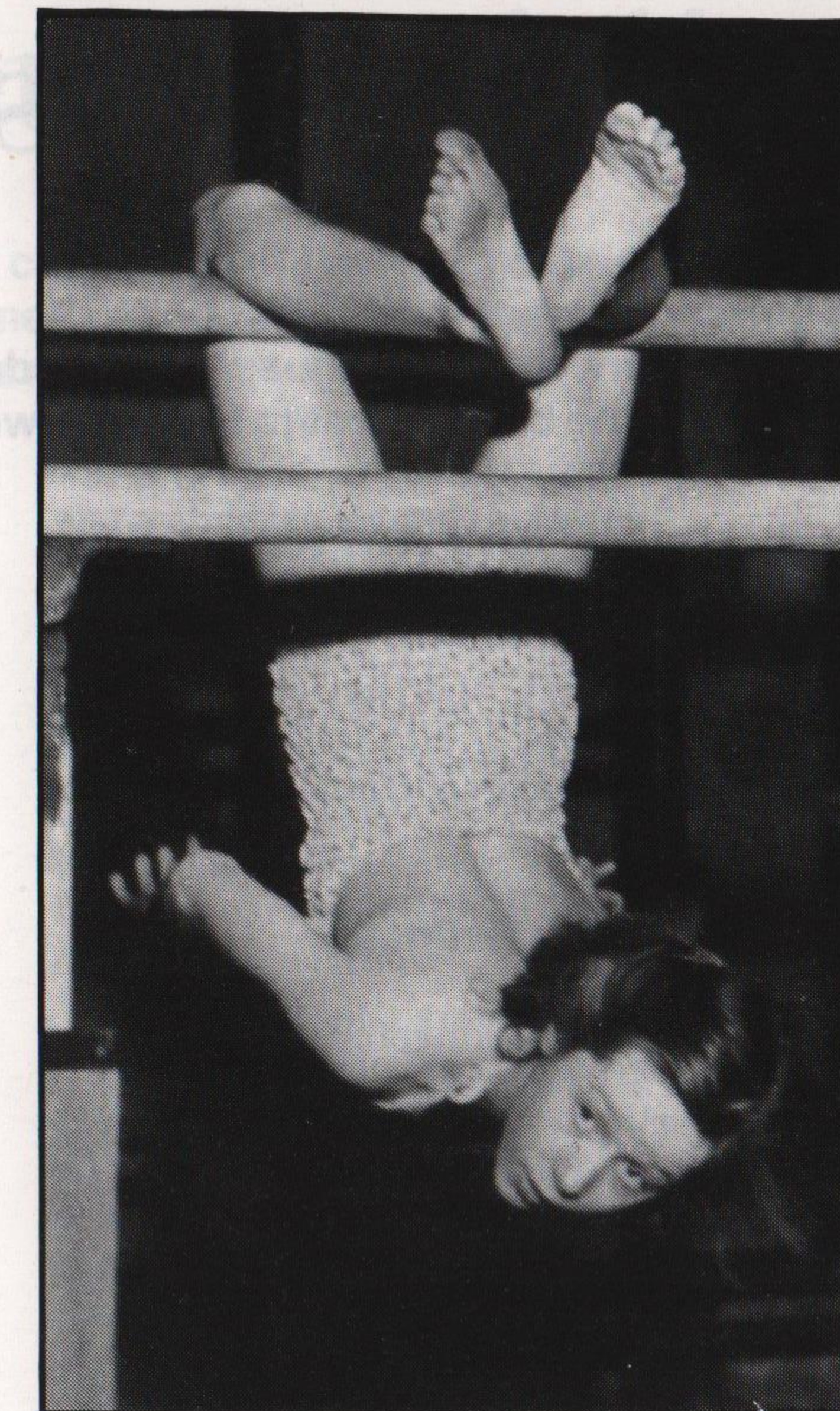
After a year or two, it became evident that, at every age and stage, the Centre children chose to do what would develop their sensory-motor and social faculties. By this I mean, among other things, their control of their limbs, impulses and actions, their knowledge and understanding of people, old and young, and their ability to be creative parts of a harmonious whole (to maintain an enjoyable play situation, for example).

They learned, too, by watching and then imitating, individually choosing their models for themselves. This happened both in the supervised "nursery" for under-fives and throughout the rest of the building where adults, adolescents and children mixed. The older children would sometimes ask an older person, whose skill they admired, for advice, or even a short course of instruction.

The children learned quickly. Successful learning-activity sharpened their appetite for learning-activity. It also appeared to increase their serenity and purposefulness. Their friendliness and unselfconscious confidence was commented on by visitors to the Centre.

The competence and maturity of the children grew apace; they exhibited responsibility for themselves and their surroundings, which Dr George Scott Williamson, the leader of the Peckham team, said is of the essence of health.

The family and neighbourhood (walking distance of the building) membership rule made for continuity of acquaintance. A family cannot be healthy if it is shut in on itself, nor if its members cannot freely seek and choose their own psychological 'nourishment', nor if they have no common



ground of experience - no shared 'territory'.

Just as a child needs to feel that it is part of a social whole - a family or group of very special people - in order to gain, amongst other things, a sense of worth and identity, so a family needs to be part of a greater whole - a neighbourhood community. The parts of these wholes need to be, in Scott Williamson's terms, "free but not loose parts".

They need to be able to act spontaneously not only according to their

present individual needs - which nobody but themselves can be aware of - but also according to the needs of the whole on which they are dependent for social sustenance.

He called this an "autonomous" relationship with the environment, and likened it to the way in which the parts of a body behave: they fulfil their individuality but also act in accordance with the needs of the body on which they are dependent for existence.

An "autonomous" relationship of this kind developed between individuals and their families, between individuals and the groups which formed in order to enjoy some activity or other and between individuals and the community that evolved within the membership as a whole. People came to value themselves more, and also the individuality of others more.

"If you have a community centre and it closes down, within two years its all forgotten. But nobody who's been a member of the Peckham Centre has ever forgotten it. We still write to Peckham friends, but we have all moved away. When the Centre was open, you would not move and you would put up with atrocious conditions." **GC**

"In a nutshell, the Centre enriched our lives - for good." **OR**

When the Centre re-opened at the end of the war, five hundred and fifty member families rejoined immediately. This was in an area not far from the London Docks, and in which one quarter of the houses had been made uninhabitable by bombing raids.



Safer sex for some

Karen Chapman, a Leicester AIDS/Health Development Worker, argues that Condom Culture, one of our society's responses to the AIDS disease, is not necessarily in the best interests of young women.

THERE ARE now over eight thousand HIV positive persons known in the UK. PWAs (Persons with AIDS) total 1,227. The number of people with the virus, or one of its variants, has not and cannot yet be calculated. For the mass of the population the risk of contracting this, so far, fatal disease has been seen to be pertinent only to certain, 'high-risk', groups. And these groups are also seen as being 'deviant'.

The syndrome was originally called GRID or Gay Related Immuno Deficiency. PWAs were originally referred to as being in the "4H Club", that is homosexuals, Haitians, hookers and heroin addicts.

highlighted how 'dangerous' sex can be. Sex has always been dangerous for women, with the risk of unwanted pregnancies, death in childbirth, abortion, cervical cancer, pill-related health problems. Other risks, maybe more important, include rape and sexual abuse.

Indictment

Now that sex is dangerous for men it has gained a focus and been put into the spotlight. This is certainly an indictment of a society that perceives 'risk' in terms of risk to men.

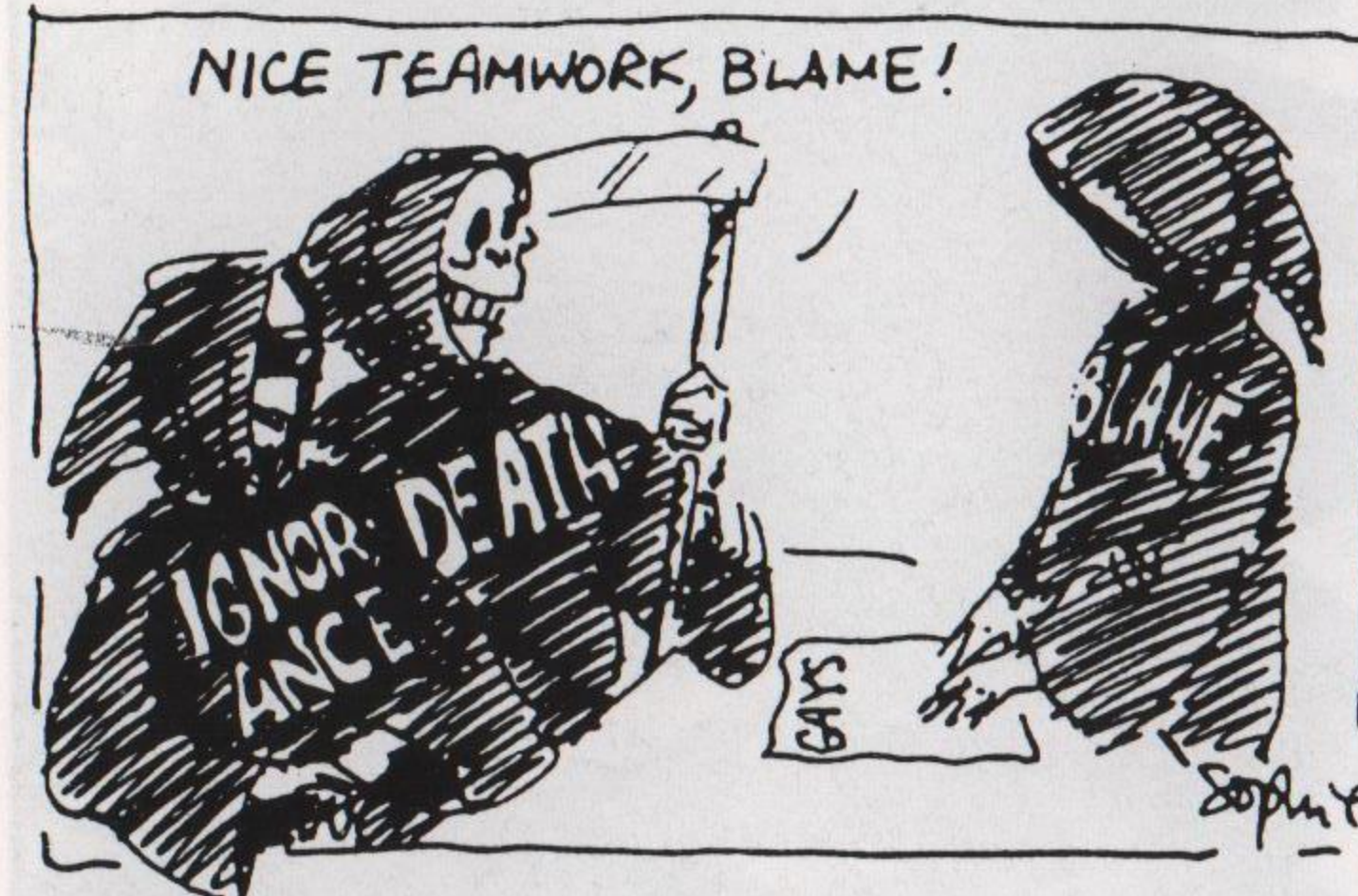


Immediate press reaction emphasised the disease as a "Gay Plague", and heightened racist connotations.

Dangerous sex

One effect of this was to allow a large proportion of people to perceive themselves as not being at risk. But AIDS is a disease that affects everybody regardless of sexuality. Certain sexual practices, and forms of drug misuse, simply create a means by which the virus is more likely to be transmitted.

It is ironic, in some ways, that AIDS has



from Strip Aids, review page 17

In working with girls and young women some areas are pulled into stark contrast, especially traditional views about the role of women. The sexual double standard has its part to play in the promotion of 'safe sex'.

Reputation of character, including sexual character, is all important to young women. To be called a "slag" or "slut" is a complete negation of character. Young women themselves recognise this double standard, but still use such insults themselves (based on the male power to abuse).

For an Asian girl in particular, her reputation is a much more deeply rooted cultural identity. To lose her 'good reputation' may be to lose all family support, chances of marriage, and to earn a label to live with for a long time.

Insults

Perhaps what is most striking is the fact that these insults and labels can be used whether or not a girl is sexually active, let alone if she is sexually active with a number of partners.

Workers with young women tend to see

sexually active girls as 'at risk', rather than practising a legitimate expression of sexual identity. Courts are likely to be more severe with an 'errant' young woman, who they define as being in 'moral danger', and young lesbian women are more likely to receive psychiatric attention.

But young women should be encouraged to define their sexuality and practice that definition as they see fit, whether or not this contravenes acceptable social standards. The important issue is that we need to talk openly about sexual practice. Not only about how women protect themselves from HIV infection, but also about unwanted pregnancies, cervical cancer and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Safer sex

Equally important is the need to develop of assertiveness techniques for the negotiation of 'safer sex' in order to develop a fuller understanding of 'safer sex' and as self-defence against would-be offenders. This includes the ability to say "no" as a right, regardless of who the sexual aggressor is, remembering that in some cases it will be the father, or some other person closely associated with the family.

In seeking to both support and encourage young women to define their sexuality and to develop their sexual identity, it is vital to include heterosexuality, with its emphasis on penetrative intercourse, as only one of several options. As such we may find ourselves in direct conflict with others, be they colleagues, parents or (given Clause 28) the law itself.

Condom Culture

The present AIDS campaign, and the various responses to AIDS, may not be in the best interest of young women. Condom Culture, the process of selling responsibility for ensuring the use of a condom to young women, further erodes severely restricted rights. Girls have been called "slags" and "sluts" for too long to accept yet another reason for abuse. Dominant male norms are not likely to be challenged to such an extent that a girl will no longer be condemned for being "prepared for sex", or have her wish not to have sex respected, if she carries a condom.

The persistent sell of the condom seeks to maintain heterosexual, penetrative sex as the only form of sex. It is far better to be totally explicit and explain all the many varieties of sexual contact, including those of the same-sex, and singularly undertaken kind.

No longer such a different story

One of the earliest and least publicised casualties of the now notorious Clause 28 of the Tory Local Government Bill was a pair of 20-minute television programmes called *A Different Story* produced by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) television service. Graham Wade reports.

DUE FOR RELEASE to secondary schools last January, the documentaries were withdrawn at the last minute for fear that they would fall foul of Clause 28 when it reached the statute book. There had already been a round of stringent legal examination designed to make sure they did not offend against the Department of Education and Science (DES) sex education circular, issued last September.

Promotion

The DES pronouncement was a clear precursor of Clause 28, containing the idea that there was "no place in any school in any circumstances (for material) which advocates homosexual behaviour (or) presents it as the norm".

Clause 28 says: "A local authority shall not (a) promote homosexuality or (b) promote the teaching of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship." Clearly there will be great difficulty in legally assessing what amounts to "promotion" - as many observers have noted, mere mention of homosexuality could possibly be construed as "promotion".

Interestingly enough, the two allowable exceptions to Clause 28 are the discussion of homosexuality in the context of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It doesn't take a genius to work out that this

will lead to an automatic association in many children's minds between homosexuals and unpleasant illnesses.

The ILEA television programmes "were made to counteract prejudice, stereotyping and ignorance" of homosexuals among upper secondary school students, explains Liz Dibb, an advisory teacher responsible for sex education. She says that she fought for two years to get the documentaries an official green light.

They focus on a group of young gays in ILEA schools who have publicly admitted their homosexuality. "The programmes allow them to discuss their experiences, the prejudices and the difficulties they've been through - their situation in school, with their friends and families," says Peter Weiss, head of the television centre.

Isolation

"They talk about how they told their friends and relations and how they went through isolation before they came out," adds Liz Dibb. "They then point out in a discussion with straight sixth formers that many young lesbians and gays don't come out of their isolation at all."

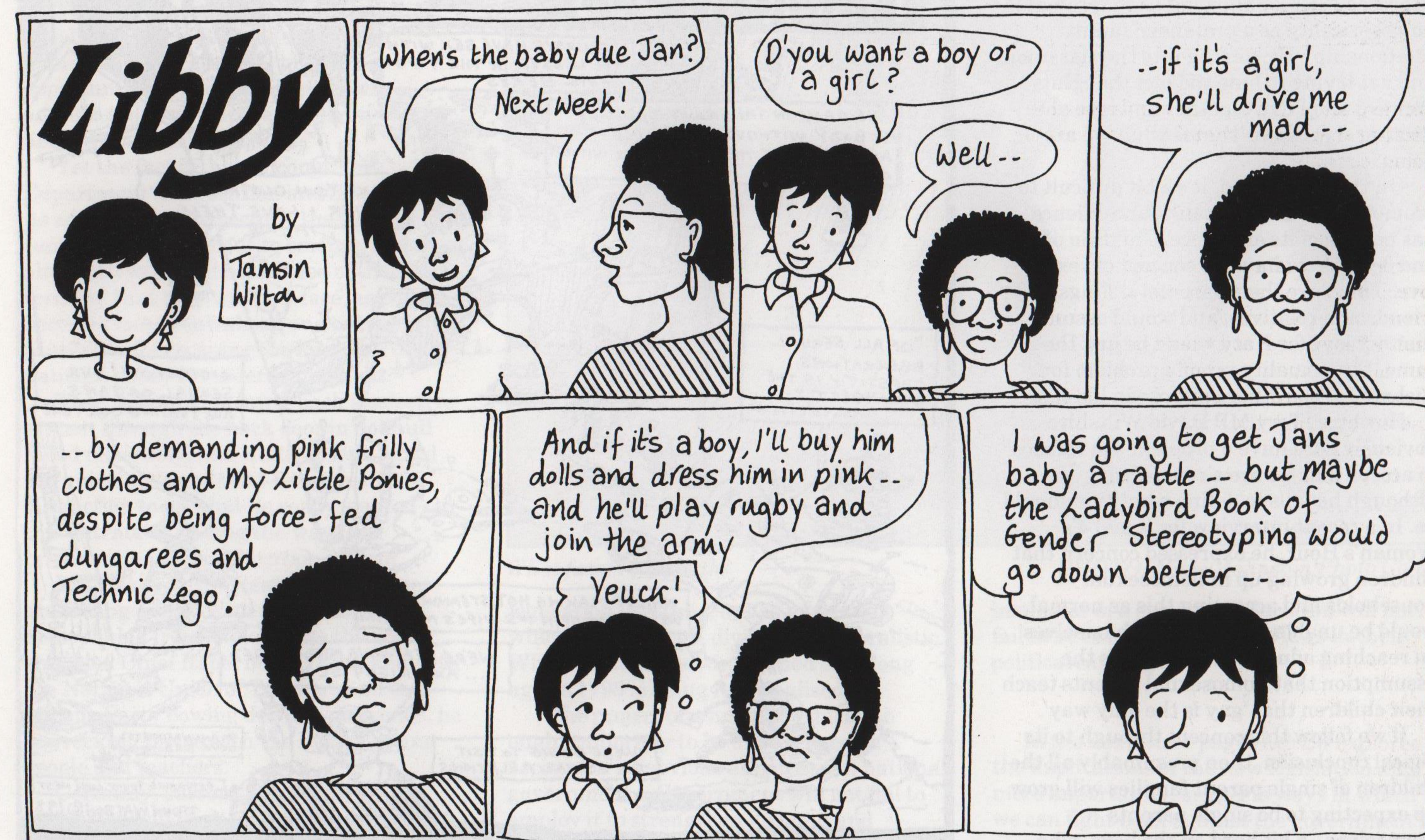
It now looks as if the ILEA programmes will not be released, although a final decision is yet to be taken. Ironically, the programmes are likely to be among the

final batch made by the ILEA television centre, as it is earmarked for closure as a result of the 13 per cent budget cuts recently imposed by Kenneth Baker as part of the government's ratecapping obsession. In any case, the death of ILEA in two year's time would guarantee the end of the television facility - the last one of its type remaining in the UK educational system.

Censorship

The BBC's controller of education broadcasting has also said that Clause 28 will prevent programmes about homosexuality finding a place on school's television schedules. However, in late 1986, BBC Schools withdrew a pair of dramas about two gay teenagers made for the *Scene* series - so the BBC is an old hand at sexual censorship in this area.

But at least the dramas - now called *Two of Us* (replacing the original *Mates* in deference to Richard Branson's condom brand) - are slotted for a belated screening on BBC2 late in the evening. Of course, there's always a chance that they'll be discarded for another two years, or even forever. One thing is certain: under the present official climate they will never be seen on schools' television.

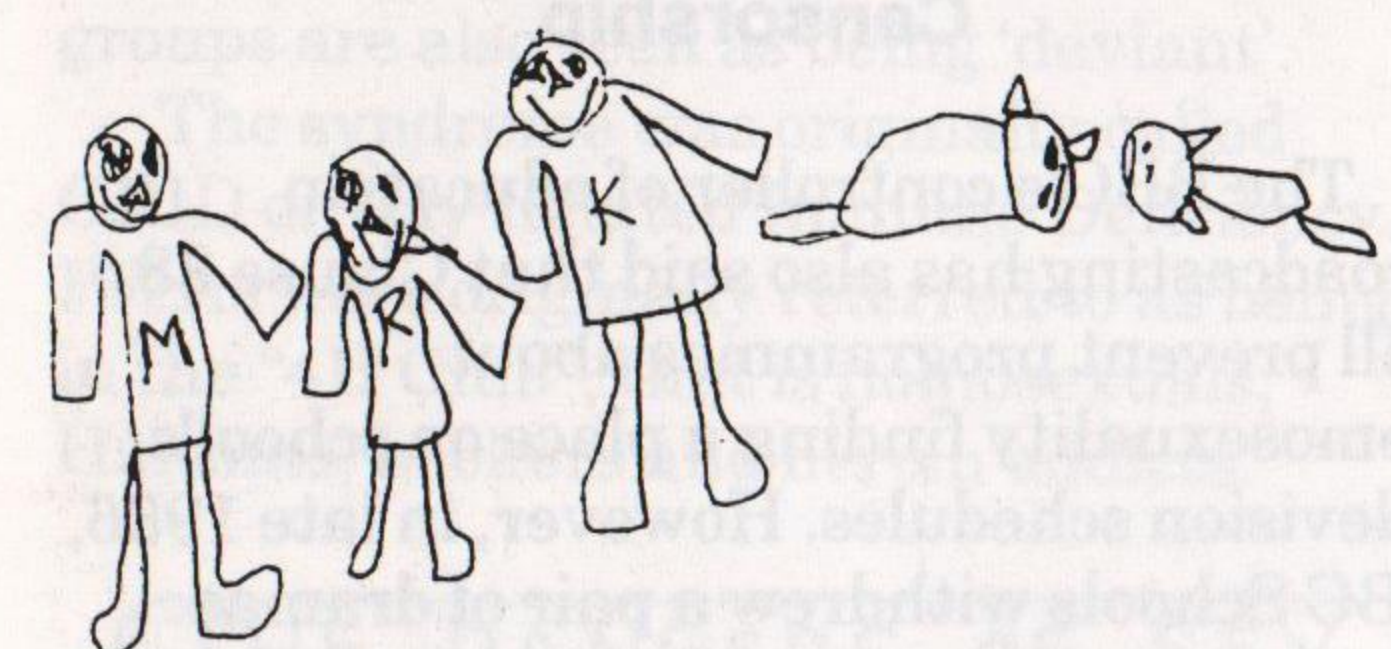


Love, sexuality and family values

"A local authority shall not promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship..." Fenja Hill describes how this will affect her family.

EVERY THURSDAY afternoon, for the last few months, I have spent three hours in my son's classroom. I listen to readers, tie shoe-laces, mop up nose-bleeds, teach children to read maps and generally try to take some of the pressure off their teacher.

I have a good time and I know the children enjoy having an extra adult around. The class teacher clearly finds me



useful and can offer more individual attention to the children than when she is alone.

On Friday's my lover does the same thing. The children are fond of her and look forward to seeing her. In fact, some of the children confuse us with one another (although we are not physically alike). This is presumably because they see both of us as the adults who are associated with my son, Richard.

However, in a few months, when Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill becomes law, Richard's head teacher could be open to prosecution for allowing us to "promote homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". By coming into the classroom and not trying to hide the fact that Katy, Richard and I live together and love one another, I presume that is what we are doing.

On the other hand, it's a bit difficult to promote something when your audience has no idea of its existence. Children of 5 and 6 years old have no concept of sexual love. They love their parents, siblings, friends and relatives, and would assume that my love for Katy would be just the same. My sexuality is not a problem for Richard, or the other children in his class.

However, Tory MP David Wiltshire obviously does have a problem. He refuses to accept that we are a real family, although he fails to define what this should be. In a recent interview for Radio 4's Woman's Hour, he expressed concern that children growing up in homosexual households and accepting this as normal, would be unable to reproduce themselves on reaching adulthood. He makes the assumption that homosexual parents teach their children that 'gay is the only way'.

If we follow this concept through to its logical conclusion, then presumably all the children of single parent families will grow up expecting to be single parents themselves - a bit hard on the boys, who

start at a distinct disadvantage. And what about the children being brought up by grandparents or foster parents, or in Local Authority care? Are we to assume that they all see their present family life as the only one available?

Isn't it time that we gave a little credit to the natural intelligence of our children? They are not totally oblivious to the world around them. They may have friends from different backgrounds. They watch television!

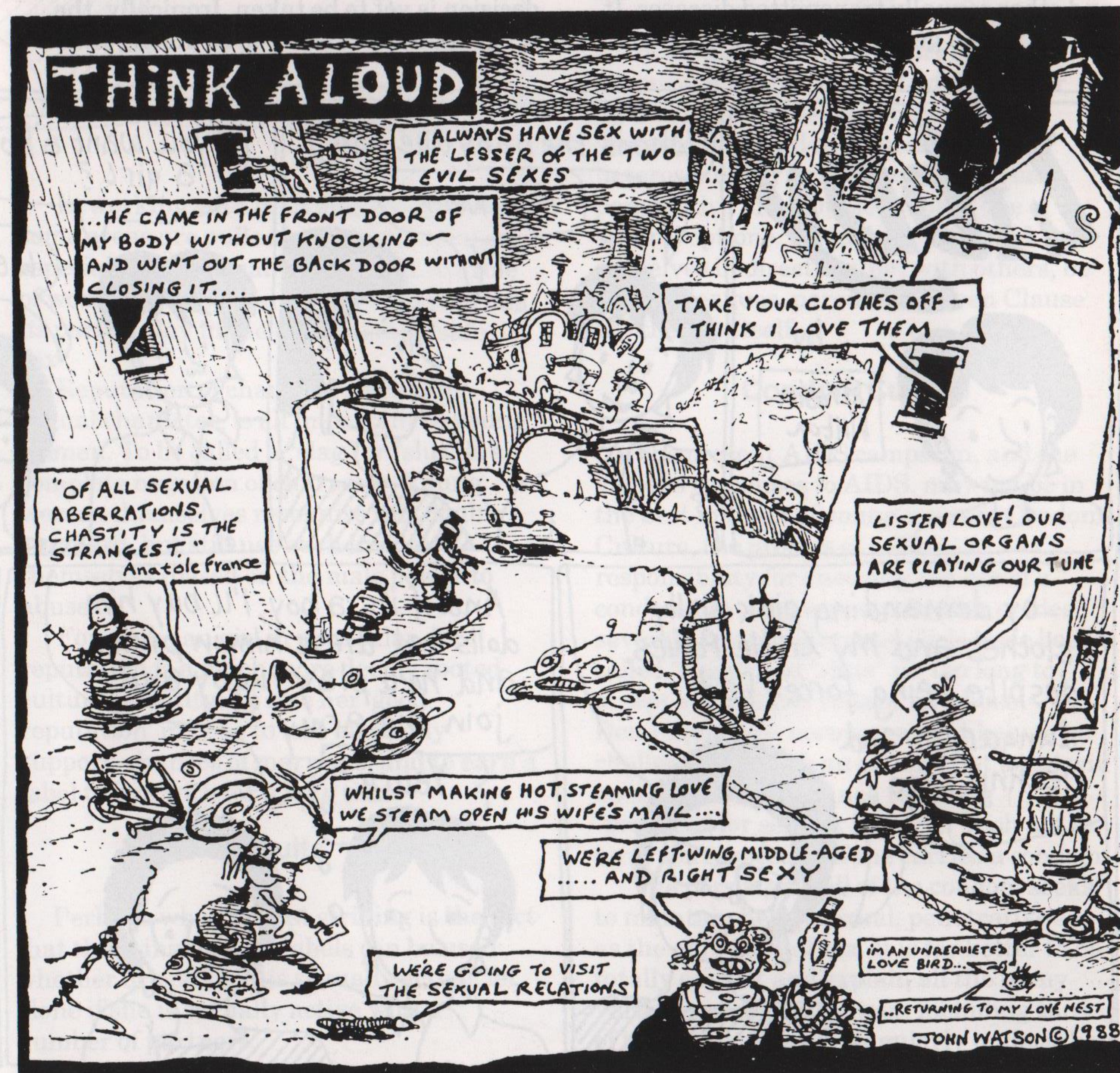
In fact, if nobody else does it, the media will ensure that they all learn what 'real' family life looks like. What is this government worried about? Any amount of promotion which occurs in schools, or elsewhere, will always be outweighed by the adverse publicity being forced down our throats everywhere we go.

My son is happy, secure and confident. He loves me and he loves Katy. His friends visit him at our home, and he visits them. None of them sees anything strange in the fact that many of their lifestyles differ. In a recent video made by the children, Richard talks about a summer holiday spent with

his grandparents by the sea. He does not feel it necessary to explain that these grandparents are, in fact, the parents of his mother's lover. And who would care anyway?

When Clause 28 becomes law, Richard will presumably no longer be allowed to talk about his extension of his pretended family, or about his trip to the BBC to tell Woman's Hour his views on family life. He will be refused freedom of speech at the tender age of 6, by a government whose sole motive, at least according to David Wiltshire, seems to be ensuring that we continue to populate an already over-populated world.

This is a very personal view of what The Clause will mean. I make no apologies for that. I am going to feel it personally, and so are my lover and my son. So are thousands of others who just want to be left alone to get on with their lives in peace. Many of them are not in a position to be able to speak out, so those of us who are, must continue to do so. My child must not be silenced. He deserves an equal chance - and I'm going to make sure he gets it.



Back to the future

Lib Ed considers the 'Great Reforming' legislation

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT Bill and the Great Education Reform Bill (GERBIL) will transform schools and schooling in Britain. The lives of young people and the rights of teachers as a group of workers will become worse.

Lib Ed has never championed schools as centres of enlightenment, neither has it seen teachers, in general, as liberators. However, it has always looked to develop and campaign for libertarian approaches to learning in schools, out of a concern to improve the quality of life for young people in them.

Lib Ed has also attempted to support teachers looking to try to help liberate learning in their teaching methods, styles and through industrial activity.

Libertarians cannot turn their backs on the implications of the Local Government Bill for lesbians and gays, especially in schools. Nor can they ignore the likely consequences of opting out, open enrolment, local financial management, national curriculum and national testing, and the abolition of employment protection for teachers, all of which feature largely in Baker's Bill.

There are those who believe that the legislation will give those seeking an alternative education far greater opportunities. All of a sudden we are encouraged to anticipate an emergence of libertarian alternatives.

Yet the fact is that, through the Department of Education and Science and its advisors and inspectors, the tightest central control is about to emerge. Existing alternatives should be warned of the likely scrutiny that they will now face, as power becomes more centralised and every possibility for escaping the long arm of a national policy is rendered impotent.

Their attempts to bring back a selective system through the back door in Solihull failed miserably, and Keith Joseph found the union action of 1984-6 too much of a distraction to do what he really wanted - to concentrate on paving the way for a privatisation of the education system.

But Baker is confident and the Tories are feeling cocky. With the columns of homophobia from Anderton to the now ennobled Chief Rabbi behind him, and with the National Union of Teachers and the Labour Party bowing down in deference, he is wrecking havoc with the lives of young people and teachers.

Certainly, current government legislation will rank with the legislation of 1870, 1902 and 1944 - not as pioneering



What future for youth?

PHOTO: Nicky Johnston/Photo Co-op

legislation this time, but as legislation which is pernicious, divisive and moralistic. What William Godwin warned of as long ago as 1793 is being fully realised:

"The project of a national education ought uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government... Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutes... Their view as

instigator of a system of education will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity."

In the next three pages Lib Ed explores the implications of the new legislation and, more importantly, suggests ways in which we can fight back against the government's plans for education.

Bigot No.1

Peter Bruinvells - Former MP for Leicester East, now Religious Affairs correspondent for the Sun. A member of the General Synod of the Church of England.

"I do not agree with homosexuality. I think that Clause 28 will help outlaw it, and the rest will be done by AIDS. With a substantial number of homosexuals dying of AIDS I think that's probably the best way."



Back to the closet

LESBIANS AND GAY MEN are second-class citizens - it's official. That's the essence of Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which stops local councils from "promoting" homosexuality. The implications for schools are horrendous, as it will no longer be possible to discuss lesbianism and homosexuality openly and honestly in the classroom.

We can now anticipate a nightmare scenario, where a wide range of books will be removed from school libraries, large numbers of worksheets withdrawn from courses, to say nothing of lesbian and gay teachers having to operate in a climate of heightened fear and scrutiny.

What small steps that have been made in recent years which might allow young

lesbian women and gay men to feel able to come out in schools, or at least to find some legitimacy in exploring their sexuality, are about to be retraced. The overall effect can only be one that drives lesbianism and homosexuality back into the closet

This clause is the most serious denial of the liberties of lesbians and gay men since sex between males was made a criminal offence in 1885. Councils will now effectively be banned from doing anything to tackle discrimination and prejudice against lesbians and gays.

The vague terminology of the clause is such that this interpretation is by no means far-fetched. What, after all, does promotion mean?

It is clear that the government and the opposition can both say that they are against local authorities "promoting" homosexuality. This was evident in the committee stage of the bill. However, they don't share the same interpretation. Offering "positive images" of homosexuality in the classroom does not equal promotion, say the opposition. Oh yes it does, said the government. Thus we are left in no doubt what the future holds.

Open enrolment

ALL SCHOOLS with more than 300 pupils will be eligible to opt out of local education authority control. If the governors wish to apply for grant-maintained status, or are requested to do so by the parents of at least 20% of the pupils, they must hold a ballot of all parents in the school.

A simple majority of those voting in favour will be enough to oblige the governors to apply to the Secretary of State for a school to become grant-maintained. These schools will receive funding through the government, but the money will come from the local education authority, though it will have no further control or responsibility.

The creation of these new grant-maintained schools will establish two clearly defined types of school. In order to ensure its success, a grant-maintained school will be under pressure to select its pupils on the basis of ability or home background, and there will be little incentive to admit children with special

Opting out

THE GOVERNMENT is proposing to allow all schools to admit pupils up to their capacity, determined by the governors. This will mean that parents can choose which school their child will go to, unless the school is already full to capacity.

However, Local Education Authorities have previously set planned admission limits to schools, in order to spread pupils more evenly, and to protect the curriculum where school rolls have fallen. Under the new Act this will not be possible, and many schools will be forced to close as parents choose to send their children to more popular schools.

This will deprive some areas of their local community school, particularly in inner city areas. It will disadvantage areas where different ethnic minorities have settled, and will actually decrease choice. It could even lead to racial segregation, if white parents follow the example of Dewsbury and wish to send their children to "all white" schools.

Furthermore, there are no safeguards, within the government's proposals, to prevent schools favouring boys over girls where there is competition for places. Under open enrolment the removal of admission limits will increase the need for schools to select pupils, rather than increase choice.

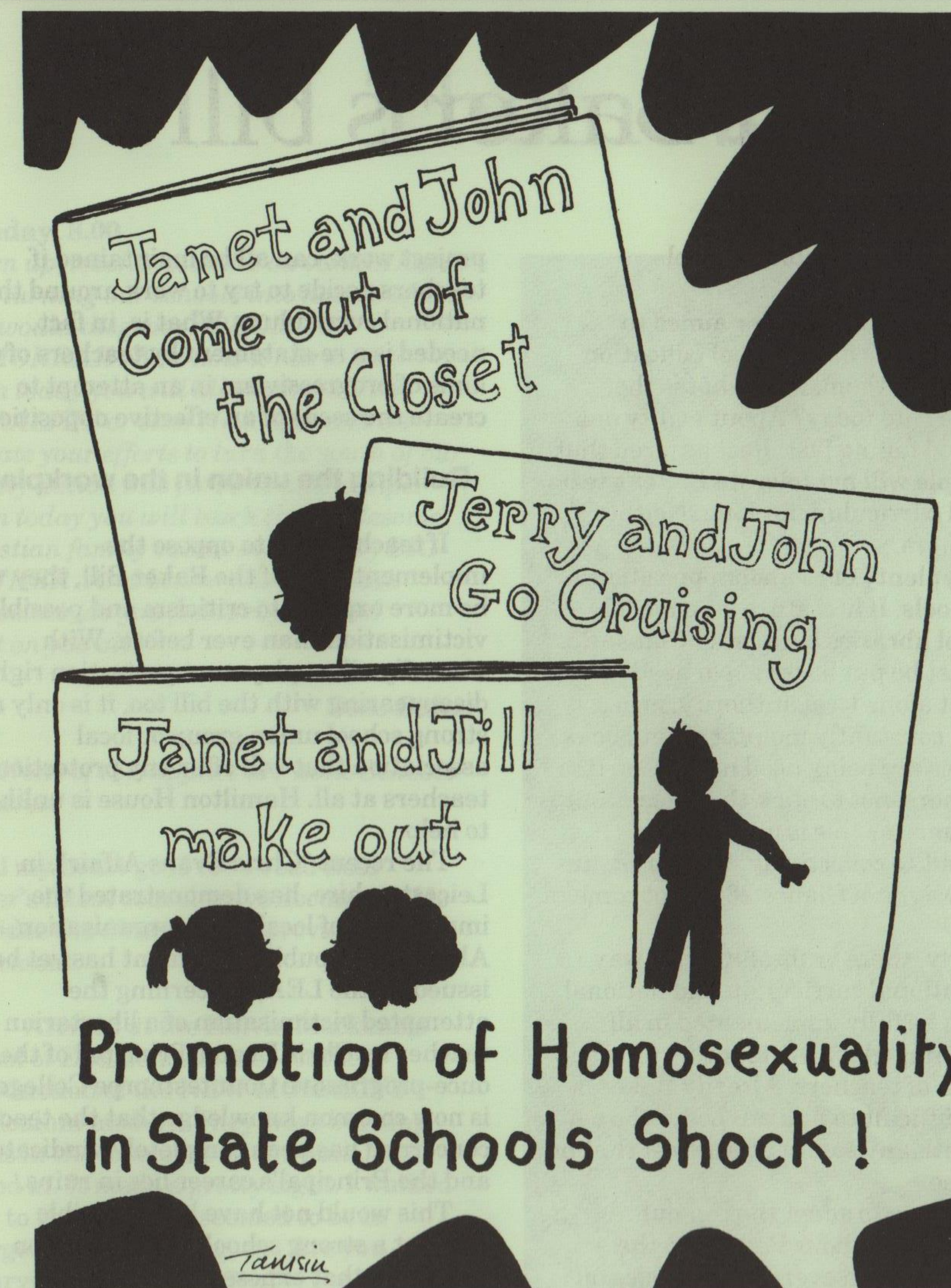
We can anticipate a situation where pupils are chosen on racial or religious grounds, or by class, gender and ability, leading to the increased segregation of children. Spurious notions of popularity will force closure of schools in deprived areas in particular. Choice will only have real meaning for a very small minority of rich parents. Young people will again be the ones to suffer.

educational needs.

Furthermore, grant-maintained schools will not have ready access to a wide range of services provided by local education authorities, such as English as a Second Language teaching and advisory services. Neither will the schools have to comply with equal opportunities policies and practices. Opting out, then, will increase divisions between schools on class, racial and gender grounds.

Young people are denied any rights or say in their own schooling. The proposal that a simple majority of the voting parents could take a school into the private sector ignores the danger of a low poll producing an unrepresentative result.

What of future parents and children? There are no arrangements for a school to reverse its decision to opt out. The Tory government is pandering to the demands of a small number bourgeois parents who have always rued the demise of direct grant schools.



The new serfdom

ONE OF BAKER'S prime intentions, with his pet GERBIL, is to settle scores with the teachers unions. As part of this he proposes to dramatically increase the considerable powers and responsibilities of head teachers, giving them financial control over their schools for the first time.

This new Local Financial Management will provide a convenient means of avoiding the political flak that education cuts usually involve, because individual schools will have to implement them.

Local Financial Management will also lead to a serious deterioration in teachers' pay and working conditions, as savings are made at their expense. The various pilot schemes throughout the country have already produced stories of teachers sweeping their classrooms at the end of the day, and sitting in the dark in the staffroom.

In one authority, within a short period of time, one third of the staff employed in the pilot schools were found to be on temporary contracts, as this allows for more flexible budgeting. Some heads have actually boasted of the savings they have made by appointing candidates at the bottom of the scale, or by leaving posts vacant.

Clause 137 of the Bill will make many County Agreements, currently negotiated by the unions, invalid. Class size, cover

arrangements, discretion over allowances, and increments and redundancy will all become school matters. Schools will be allowed to appoint unqualified staff, 'train' them on the job, and apply to the DES for certification. Eventually the intention is that salaries will be fixed school by school.

Head teachers and governors will be given a green light to get rid of 'unsuitable' staff, either by redundancy or dismissal, and the local authority, which will have no say in the matter, will nevertheless have to pick up the bill. The recent "Chris Evans Affair", at Countesthorpe in Leicestershire, shows the potential that exists for victimisation.

On top of that, many staff will be at risk as the National Curriculum comes into effect, and some subject areas contract or even disappear. Baker has even taken reserve powers to deny teachers the right of appeal to industrial tribunals.

What has been the response of head teachers to this attack on their staff? Their associates have demanded massive pay rises (Secondary Heads Association - 35%, National Association of Head Teachers - 20%) in return for exercising their new powers. It is only to be expected that, when teachers are being reduced to conditions of serfdom, heads demand the status and income of feudal lords.

Testing

THE EMPHASIS placed by the government on national testing is the most retrograde step of all its proposals. For many years it has been generally accepted that no test is completely free from class or cultural values. Tests in this country have always favoured the white upper and middle class elites. The extension of testing is bound to reinforce this tendency.

It is unavoidable that children, of their own volition or as the proxies of their parents, will be thrown into more competition with each other.

By its very nature, testing, whatever form it takes, will reinforce failure for large numbers of children, and the requirement to test at 7, 11, 14 and 16 will reinforce the notion that the basis of education is competition rather than development.

Curriculum control

THE PROPOSALS for a National Curriculum lay down what children will have to study. There will be three 'core' subjects: Maths, English and Science. Then there are the 'foundation' subjects: History, Geography, Technology, Music, Art, Physical Education and, for secondary schools, a modern foreign language. Religious Education will continue to be compulsory, but does not have the status of a core or foundation subject.

What little choice that exists for children in schools is about to be eradicated in one swoop. Any choice that might remain within subjects is reduced by the determination to introduce standardised testing, controlled centrally, via the 7, 11, 14 and 16 year old tests.

If we take modern languages as an example, it is unlikely that any schools will be able to offer a language spoken by an ethnic minority group. These languages will receive even less support than at present, and pupils who might wish to study Urdu or Chinese will have to study French or German instead.

Those who welcomed GCSE as a progressive reform might now rue the day that they did, given the national criteria that now exist for content and grading. One of the main reasons for introducing national tests is so that the government can control exactly what is taught in schools.

Apart from restricting the choice for children at school, the proposals also fail to address gender, class and ethnic issues. Even if it were true, the provision of equal access to the same curriculum will not create equal opportunities for all children.

The proposals fail to take account of the many effective anti-sexist and anti-racist practices developed in recent years. Furthermore cross-curricular and individualised approaches to teaching, which use a child's experience as the base for learning will also be at risk.

Biting back at Baker's bill

WHEN THE DONS at the NUT HQ, Hamilton House, announced the calling off of industrial action against the Baker impositions, the only teachers' union capable of mounting a real campaign against the Tory educational legislation left the field. We now know why. Doug McAvoys and his junta had seen the light, they too had realised the weakness of militancy.

Striking would not defeat the Tories' plans, what was needed was a lobby of "potentially supportive Lords". And when that failed, Captain Pugwash hatched a new scheme, a lobby of "all Lords". And what are we left with?

A Labour Party which is spending most of its time arguing that the National Curriculum should be extended to the Independent sector. An NUT that has spent £20,000 on designing a new logo, an outstretched hand that appears to be begging its lost members back.

Who gives a damn about the independent sector? What is the point of trying to win back the hearts and minds of thousands of teachers who never should have been in the NUT in the first place and who did all they could to sabotage the industrial action in 1984-6?

The Baker Bill will reach the statute book virtually unamended. We can forget the Labour Party. We can forget the new, more centrally controlled, NUT. The fight against the new legislation now rests with teachers and young people themselves.

Creating an opposition

Sometimes it is all too easy to see the state as something which is all-embracing and all-powerful. It seems that its arms reach everywhere. And yet there are always gaps, spaces and loopholes. Never has one piece of educational legislation achieved all it set out to do.

Legislation between 1870 and 1918 sought to make school attendance compulsory. It moved the attendance rate upwards by about ten per cent. In 1918 about 80 per cent of children under the age

of fourteen were attending school regularly.

Lloyd George and Butler aimed to improve it. So too did a host of education ministers after them. And what is the attendance rate today? About eighty one per cent and falling fast. Rest assured that young people will not tolerate Baker's tests and turgid curriculum for long. Neither must teachers.

There's plenty of room for opposition within schools. If literature is removed from school libraries because of Clause 28, then it must be put back in. No head teacher, let alone local authority, is in a position to constantly monitor what books or resources are being used in schools. It is up to teachers, not to stick their necks out as individuals, as this is no time for martyrs, but to collectively work to ensure that the designs of Clause 28 do not come to fruition.

Similarly, there is absolutely no way that the national curriculum and national testing can be fully implemented in all their sickening glory without the cooperation of teachers. Already Baker is finding it difficult to find anybody who can come up with any sort of Maths test that he wants to see.

It is too easy to adopt the cop-out approach of the Labour Party and the NUT. From now on everything hinges on teachers subverting the national testing and working against the national curriculum. It is naive to imagine that the national tests and curriculum will not be implemented. Yet many teachers appear mesmerised, incapable of rising from their inactivity because they cannot believe that anything quite so drastic could ever happen.

And yet it will if it is not opposed. If we take the humanities as an example. There is little support from teachers for a return to rote learning in history and studying the capitals of the world in Geography.

Inside schools the gains made by progressivism, integrated and resource-based learning, individualised study,

project work, can all be maintained if teachers decide to try to work around the national curriculum. What is, in fact, needed is a re-statement by teachers of the aims of progressivism in an attempt to create the seeds of an effective opposition.

Building the union in the workplace

If teachers are to oppose the implementation of the Baker Bill, they will be more exposed to criticism and possible victimisation than ever before. With virtually all employment protection rights disappearing with the bill too, it is only a strong school union group or local association that will offer any protection to teachers at all. Hamilton House is unlikely to help.

The recent "Chris Evans Affair", in Leicestershire, has demonstrated the importance of local union organisation. Although no public statement has yet been issued by the LEA, concerning the attempted victimisation of a libertarian teacher by Chris Evans, Principal of the once-progressive Countesthorpe College, it is now common knowledge that the teacher concerned has been completely vindicated, and the Principal's career lies in ruins.

This would not have been possible without a strong school and local union campaign that exposed the scandal, mobilised support and pursued matters so far that there is shortly to be a members' enquiry on the County Council to establish exactly why Evans has not yet been disciplined.

Currently, local authorities and head teachers are testing out the ground in schools over directed time and cover. These same bureaucrats will soon be doing the same for the Baker impositions, for they will be responsible for its implementation.

With the support and backing of a strong school union group and an organised local association, teachers can prevent their own lives and the lives of children in school from becoming as bad as the current government would like.

The new morality

Monday, 8.00

Listen up, teacher scum! You vermin have been turning our schools into houses of sin that would disgrace SODOM and GOMORRAH. Well now it has to stop! From today you will all teach the NEW MORALITY or else! No longer will we tolerate your efforts to turn the youth of our mighty nation into perverts and wimps. From today you will teach the wholesome Christian family values espoused by BIG MOTHER. And before you object, ask yourselves, do you feel lucky, punks? I spit on you all!

Boss Baker

P.S. None of this applies to Public Schools of course.

It did my heart good to re-read Boss Baker's latest consultative document. He provides the direction, we provide the movement.

9.30 Arrived at the Kelvin Mackenzie School of Excellence to inspect the introduction of the NEW MORALITY curriculum module. They were burning books in the forecourt as our pursuit car pulled in. It made a pretty sight. I walked over to the UQ* who seemed to be in charge. "Good morning, sir. Are you supervising this operation?" "Yeah, I'm the Head of English, pal. Wossit to you?" "I would just like to congratulate you on your efficiency." "Oh, that's different, mate. I thought you was one of them teacher wankers. Yeah, well, we started at A for Auden and we're working through to W for Wilde. So far we're at F for Forster. Mind you, sometimes I wonder what all the fuss is about, no one ever read this crap anyway."

10.10 Visited a personal relationship class. The pre-doles were sitting quietly, colouring in their Sun newspapers and sniggering amongst themselves. The teacher slithered over. "I say," he whimpered, "don't you think we ought to be teaching them a bit more about personal responsibility in relationships, about the need for caring and consideration for others?" I spat in his face. "Are you trying to be funny, arsehole," I growled. "All they have to do is look at the broads on page 3 and snigger. Good clean healthy fun. And you want to pervert it into something meaningful, creep." I slapped him across the mouth and sent his glasses spinning amongst the desks. "You hear that, pre-doles?" I shouted. "This lousy commie wants to mess around with an Englishman's right to leer at naked young women." "Bloody cheek," they grumbled to themselves. "What a wanker! Let's get him!"

As I left they were getting ready to castrate the jerk. A waste of time, I



Photo by John Lowings.

thought to myself. If the creep had any balls he wouldn't be a teacher in the first place.

1.30 Arrived at the Sir Geoffrey Archer comp. Here personal relationships had been made a combined subject with business studies. As BIG MOTHER says, "EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE IN THE MARKET PLACE SOCIETY." It was very interesting reading through the Maths worksheets from the SMILE AND THINK OF ENGLAND materials developed by the Curriculum Cop task force in London. "If you have two whips, three sets of restraining straps, a wet suit, a bottle of castor oil, two blow-up dolls, four pairs of handcuffs, five dildos and a rubber sheet, how much of a good time could you have?" I make that a hell of a good time with a bottle of castor oil remainder. Heh, heh, heh!

One problem with this school. Some wierdo is trying to undermine the whole ethos of the new order. An unknown philanthropist stands outside the gates every evening giving envelopes containing £2,000 to female pre-doles without them having to do anything for it. Only a judge and jury would believe this sort of thing! It is completely undermining the school's efforts to teach the pre-doles about economic realities.

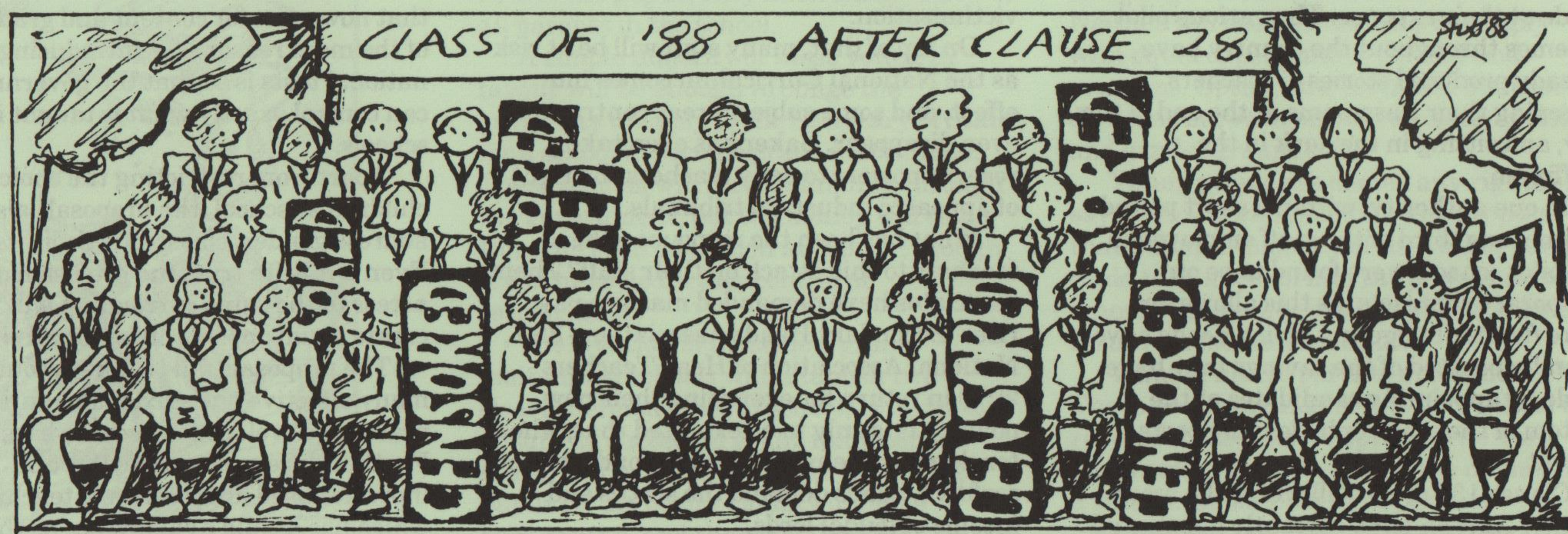
2.20 As I walked through the Cecil Parkinson comp Science complex, I couldn't help being struck by the number of female pre-doles who seemed to be pregnant. Still, it was probably just a coincidence.

"Get 'em off," the male pre-doles were chanting as their Biology teacher made a pathetic attempt to teach them about sexual reproduction. I took her aside afterwards. She complained about only having porno films and magazines to use as teaching aids. I tried to reassure her. "Hey, doll," I said, "a pretty little thing like you should be able to make Biology a lot more interesting for the lads. Why don't you smarten yourself up a bit, wear something a bit more exciting. If you play your cards right, who knows, you might wake up some morning and find a £500 allowance on your pillow." I put my hand on her knee to comfort her. "Get your stinking hands off me, you fucking bastard," she said, "or I'll break each finger individually." "OK, suit yourself, doll," I said. The broad obviously had an attitude problem. Turning down good money! I would have to make a full report.

3.20 As we drove into the Harvey Proctor comp we could hear the continual thwack of a cane punctuated by screams...

* Unqualified teacher.

GRINGE HILL



Teachers face the bigots

Gill Spraggs describes the events that followed class discussion of homosexuality in two secondary schools.

LAST AUTUMN, two teachers in a Sheffield secondary school invited members of a local Young Lesbian group into the school to talk to fourth-year girls. The aim of this initiative was to challenge stereotypes and increase the pupils' understanding of sexuality.

In the event, it evoked a nasty demonstration of bigotry from parents and hypocrisy from the local authority. An open meeting attended by eighty or ninety parents called for the teachers to be sacked.

Complaints focused on the leaflets advertising the Young Lesbian Group which were distributed to pupils during the lesson; but it was clear that most of the protesting parents were intensely anti-gay in their attitudes, and that the leaflets were chiefly a convenient pretext.

The local authority responded to the parents by holding an inquiry, at which the teachers were censured for not checking that the materials used in the lesson were suitable for a school context. One of the teachers received a written warning, the other a verbal warning.

Backward-looking

The teachers' case was certainly not helped by the fact that the dominant union at the school in question, the NAS/UWT, takes the extraordinary position that discussion on homosexual issues has no place in the classroom, which is more backward-looking, indeed, than the official view of the Inspectorate and the Department of Education and Science.

This union has for many years taken up an explicitly anti-gay stance, and in some education authorities its officers have strongly campaigned against the extension of equal opportunities policies to protect lesbian and gay teachers. This is a disgraceful record for a TUC-affiliated union.

No policy

Sheffield is a Labour authority; nevertheless, it has no policy of non-discrimination against lesbians and gays, and so has no policy of fair treatment for those of its employees who show their support for lesbian and gay people. Apart from disciplining the teachers, its sole response to the issues raised by this episode has been a bureaucratic one: it has issued guidelines to schools for vetting guest speakers!

Approached in the proper spirit, the episode might have been a constructive one; an opportunity for the authority to allay the fears of parents and examine and extend its provisions for education about homosexuality. After all, every child in its

care is growing up in a society where a significant minority of people are lesbian or gay; some of those children are or will become aware that they themselves are members of this minority.

Prejudice and bigotry

To ignore the implications of this fact is to be responsible for perpetuating a peculiarly vicious circle: ignorance breeds prejudice and bigotry, and these in turn are instrumental in ensuring that ignorance continues undisputed.

When individual teachers are made scapegoats the situation deteriorates still further, the bigotry is legitimised, while responsible educators are undermined. Sheffield is not the only local education authority which has shown a marked reluctance to recognise that those teachers who fall foul of anti-gay bigotry are paying the penalty, not necessarily of any lack of professionalism on their part, but of the

shortcomings of their own school community, of the local education authority, and of society at large.

Recently in Bradford, a supply teacher was transferred from a school after discussing his homosexuality with a group of fifth-formers. It would appear that on this occasion the subject was initiated by the pupils, rather than the teacher.

Bradford's assistant director of education is quoted as saying that the teacher was moved, not because he was gay but because he "brought aspects of his personal life into his teaching which we do not expect to be brought in". There is a smack of hypocrisy in this. Nobody objects when heterosexual teachers talk about their marriage partners, or answer pupils' questions on sexual matters.

As long as homosexuality is treated as a taboo subject in our society, it will be a matter of curiosity, and indeed anxiety, to most young people, and they will ask questions of any adult whom they think

AGE OF CONSENT

16 UNDER

The law on the Age of Consent to Sexual Intercourse must be unique. It is virtually unenforced and yet a review of the law made by a government committee in 1979 led to neither a recommendation that the law be enforced, nor, paradoxically, a recommendation to repeal it.

THERE IS PLENTY of evidence to suggest that there is widespread experience of sexual intercourse among girls under 16. For example, in 1979 there were about 10,000 conceptions among girls of 15 and under, which is evidence of at least 10,000 offences. A study in 1985 found that 16% of girls had experienced sexual intercourse before their sixteenth birthday.

Despite this evidence, prosecution is rare. In 1982 there were just 488 prosecutions for the offences of sexual intercourse with a girl under 16 or of sexual intercourse with a girl under 13. Only 112 of these prosecutions resulted in custodial sentences, and of these only 36 were for 6 months or more. The vast majority of such sentences were for intercourse with girls under 13.

We have a situation where many offences are, by virtue of pregnancy, drawn to the attention of those responsible for the 'protection' of the public, yet these offences are not reported to the police. Of those which are reported, few result in prosecution. The present prosecution rate is about 15% of reported cases, whereas the caution rate is about 47%. No other

indictable offence has a similar record of more cautions than prosecutions.

The law governing the Age of Consent has an interesting history. It was campaigned for by feminists anxious to protect young girls from exploitation by older men. Passed in 1885, following a scandal concerning young prostitutes in London, it was seen as an attack on the double-standard of sexual morality.

However, it was also supported by those who were in favour of greater sexual repression. Other provisions of the Act made homosexual acts by consenting males in private illegal, and made provision for boys to be thrashed for having sexual intercourse with girls who were under 16, no matter how old they were.

Today the law can be seen as the embodiment of the two main features of our society's attitude to sexuality: its repressive nature and its double-standard. The report of the government committee on sexual offences, published in 1979, represents these attitudes quite clearly.

It presents sexual activity as something natural and normal for boys, but undesired by and forced upon girls. It mentions the

may offer some enlightenment. As long as open bigotry and prejudice are regarded as respectable social attitudes, some of the questions they ask are likely to be tinged with malice.

Lost control

The gay teacher in Bradford is described by his head teacher as having "lost control of the situation". But the blame for this (if it is indeed the case) lies far less on the individual teacher than on his school community and the LEA.

Instead of enforcing ignorance and silence, it should be the task of the LEA to offer to teachers guidance and appropriate training. It must be the responsibility of every school community to make it entirely plain to all its members that anti-gay insults and the harassment of people who are (or who are supposed to be) lesbian or gay are unacceptable forms of behaviour and will not be tolerated.

physical and psychological harm done to girls by having intercourse at a young age. This view is justified by the use of sexist medical 'knowledge' about, for example, the causes of cervical cancer.

Sexual intercourse for young boys is not considered harmful in any way at all, and the established evidence of the role played by male sexual activity as a factor in the development of cervical cancer among women is not mentioned.

It is quite clear that the retention of this unenforced law serves to assist the control of the behaviour of the young - particularly girls - who are supposedly the victims of this offence. The committee report says, "the law assists parents in the upbringing of their children, and consequently protects a cornerstone of our society, the family. To lower the Age of Consent would weaken parental control".

The moral pressure exerted by the existence of this law is more often directed towards girls than boys. It inhibits the effective use of contraception by the young, resulting in the misery of unwanted pregnancy.

There is little evidence to suggest that the law has been successful in protecting girls from sexual exploitation. Rather it has strengthened the hand of those who wish to suppress all sexual activity among the young.

Tackling the taboos

There is far to go before attitudes of sexual denial and deep rooted prejudice are overcome and people with disabilities are able to gain their full rights as sexual beings.

IT IS EXTRAORDINARY that a recent book - "Current Approaches to Down's Syndrome" - can soldier on in an informative way about the various physical complications of this group of people, call for Down's people to be integrated into society, and take a detailed look at employment, yet at no point mentions sex and relationships.

Perhaps this is because people with disabilities are, as Susan Hannaford - herself a writer with multiple sclerosis - argues, sexually disvalued and their needs are not taken account of by society. Women, she points out, are doubly disvalued if, as traditional carers, they need to be cared for.

Sexual

Other sets of attitudes towards disability and sex vary from curiosity to voyeurism. Two recent West End plays, *Crystal Clear* and *Children of a Lesser God*, purported to inform the audiences about sexual relations, in the worlds of sight and hearing disability respectively.

In the first the audience was treated to the spectacle of two actors, representing blind people, stripping off for a close tactile encounter to get to know each other better... In the second the audience is treated to the worries of a male teacher in an institution and his relationship with one of his hearing-impaired students.

An actor in an early production from Graeae Theatre played on the curiosity element... "I'll tell you, I've done it, since the accident... Not all of us can, it depends, but I can... My God - half the time a fork lift truck would come in handy. But it is possible, always considering a willing partner. They do say about spinal injuries that they spend half the time on the bog and the other half worrying about being impotent. So it's a full life." Most people can sympathise with this statement.

However, severe learning difficulty ('mental handicap') and sex are more problematic. The case of Jeanette, a 17 year old with 'mental handicap', achieved notoriety in 1987 when three Appeal Court judges ruled that she could be sterilised. The argument ran that a pregnancy would be fatal for her, and that sterilisation would give her the right to a sex life. Jeanette, said to have a 'mental age' of 5, was not represented at the hearing.

This decision means that, legally, people with 'mental handicap' are to be considered as perpetual children. They are not. They are people with sexual rights. This is the problem with 'mental age' scores - a

maturing person with Down's Syndrome may have sexual needs which cannot be equated with a child of 5 years of age.

The main problem lies with helping people with disabilities to obtain their sexual rights. What, if any, action should be taken to help (to cite an extreme example) a young man of 16 with no limb movement and little perceptible cognitive function, and whose main sign of life is an erection?

"If we had the courage," said his teacher, "we should help him to do something about that..."

Many people who have worked with people with learning disabilities (and sometimes sensory disabilities) can relate instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour of children who masturbate openly, or who make 'inappropriate' approaches to others. This raises the whole question of what is 'appropriate' sexual behaviour - but that is a topic for another article.

Association

Recently, Sheila Stevens, in *SENSE*, the magazine for the National Deaf Blind and Rubella Handicapped Association, made a plea for a more open approach and for formal teaching about sex. Parents, often feeling residual guilt themselves, can find this topic hard to explore with children who have disabilities.

Among Sheila Stevens' objectives are "to inform people about their bodies and themselves as sexual beings." The imparting of information on the basic sexual plumbing, in the context of menstruation, masturbation and body hair, helps to put the hygiene and self-help aspects of washing and shaving in a meaningful context. She also puts sex into a context of personal relationships which involve personal and communication skills.

In spite of the legally sanctioned sterilisation of Jeanette, there seems to be reason for mild optimism. At least the topic of sex and special needs is reaching an audience. Occasional articles stressing the need for training programmes for people with cognitive disabilities, based on clear, honest and unequivocal information supplied during group learning sessions, are now appearing in magazines for health, care and education audiences.

But there is far to go before attitudes of sexual denial and deep-rooted prejudice are overcome so that all people with disabilities are able to gain, or if necessary be assisted to gain, their full rights as sexual beings.

Teenage mothers talk

Falling For Love: Teenage Mothers Talk

A book by Sue Sharpe
Virago Upstarts

THIS BOOK is subtitled *Teenage Mothers Talk*, and that is exactly what they do. This is a unique book in which pregnant teenagers and teenage women who have recently had a baby speak for themselves, powerfully and eloquently, about their experiences of pregnancy, birth and motherhood.

Sue Sharpe's role has been to sensitively organise this wealth of information, gained from interviews with thirty women, into chapters which deal with contraception, love and boyfriends; relationships with parents; experiences of school and education; marriage; alternatives to having the baby; financial problems and housing; and personal changes.

At the beginning of the book the young women set out to answer, in their own words, the question which perennially puzzles middle class teachers, social workers and parents alike: why didn't you use any contraception? The explanations are various.

Some were "between pills" (changing from one brand to another), a few were quite sure that they wouldn't become pregnant, one had been refused contraceptive pills by her family doctor, and for many it was clear that the legacy of Victoria Gillick's campaign had a strong impact - the young women felt that it would be pointless trying to obtain contraception from their GP, and, what's more, she or he might tell their parents.

One of the most frequently mentioned reasons, however, referred to the double-standard trap in which the girls were caught - "if you do it you're a slag, if you don't you're a tight bitch". To use contraception, was to prepare for and to expect sex and put you firmly in the first category - something the young women

were naturally anxious to avoid.

Indeed, other people's attitudes were cited time and again by the women talking in this book as sources of problems, anger and distress - the attitudes of pupils and teachers at school to the pregnancy, the attitude of staff at ante-natal clinics to their young and unmarried status, of nurses in the hospital, and of people generally who "look down their noses at you when they pass you in the street".

Most important to the women, of course, were the attitudes of their parents and boyfriends. Many were very, very worried about their parents' reaction and delayed telling them for anything up to seven or eight months. One woman told her sister (who told her mum) only four days before her child was born.

Contrary to the young women's fears, parents (especially mothers) were almost universally supportive, often attending at the birth and helping tremendously with childcare afterwards. The young women in this book all recommend that others in the same situation tell their parents straight away. Many of them felt that by not doing so they had missed out on the potential enjoyment of pregnancy.

Unfortunately, the young women's partners were far from caring. Many left the women as soon as they found out, and "didn't want to know". Others were initially enthusiastic and pledged their support and continuing love, only to leave halfway through the pregnancy, or soon after the birth of the baby, when the reality of their commitment came home to them.

Of the third of the men who stayed with their partners, most were only there intermittently, did little to help with the baby or housework, often spent the women's carefully budgeted household money on drink and frequently beat their partners. It's a depressing picture and forms a stark contrast to the women's strength, courage and commitment which radiates from the pages of this book.

The book deals with many topics and is a powerful indictment of life at school in general and of sex education in particular. Folosade writes:

"There was just this square packet and this rubber thing shaped like an oval and a row of yellow pills. The cap they showed us was for an elephant, a massive thing. You couldn't get it into perspective at all... I once said to my biology teacher 'Why are so many girls getting pregnant?' and she said 'Didn't you listen on lesson?' I said 'You didn't tell me anything. Did you tell me where the Family Planning Clinics are, what they do. What age you can get the pill. Did you tell me how to go about it? you have to search through for yourself.'"

But Sue Sharpe does not just deal with schooling, she also looks at the alternatives which exist for pregnant schoolgirls - for example home tuition or participation in one of the growing number of libertarian projects for school age mothers.

Falling for Love is firmly within the mould of personal/political literature, but Sue Sharpe is also careful to stress the importance of what is usually seen as traditional politics for the women's lives. She brings to the forefront the idea that one of the women's main problems is poverty.

Unemployment, and a lack of creche and nursery facilities, means that all the women in this book were forced to rely on Supplementary Benefit, some living with their parents, others in poor housing and others still in Board and Lodging accommodation.

The Social Security Act which has just come into effect will make things even worse, with under sixteen year olds and all those not on Supp Ben losing their entitlement to maternity grant, child benefit and milk and vitamin tokens.

Just two criticisms. For me, the most disappointing part of the book is the section on alternatives to keeping the baby. In this section abortion is almost glossed over. The most obvious explanation for this is that the women talking in the book had all chosen to have their babies.

However it is a sad omission, and discussion about it will, I feel, be missed by young women who are themselves pregnant and are turning to the book to help them make a decision that will be right for them and their child. To compensate for this lack there are excellent sections on adoption and on having a child who is disabled in some way.

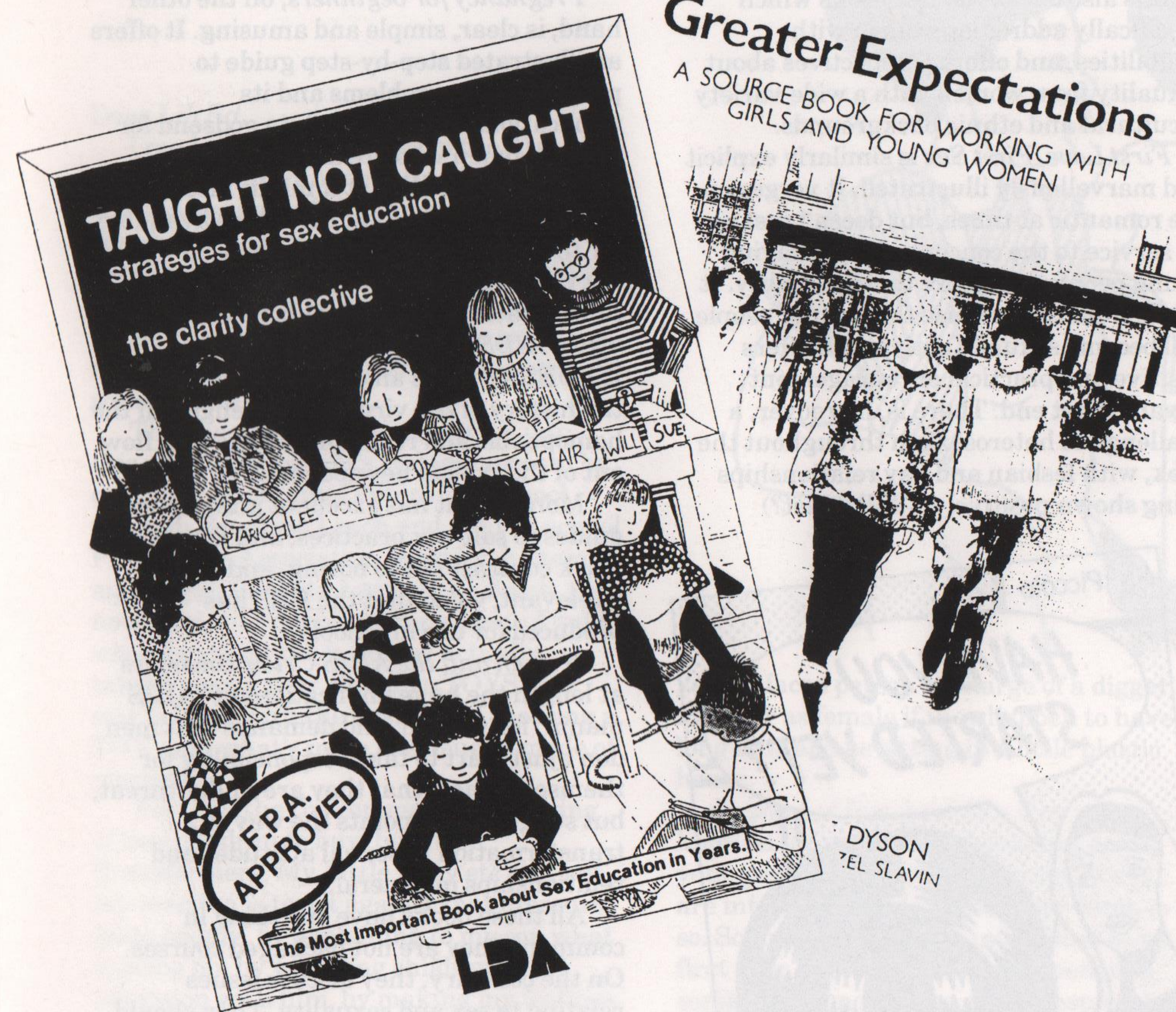
Secondly, why does a book which is concerned about the status of teenage mothers in our society insist upon referring to them as 'girls'? This puzzles me greatly, and detracts from the impact of an otherwise excellent book.

Falling for Love will educate and move you. Read it.

Challenging sexism

Greater Expectations

A SOURCE BOOK FOR WORKING WITH GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN



Taught not Caught

A book by The Clarity Collective
available from *Learning Development Aids*,
Cambridge. £9.95

Greater Expectations

A book by Tricia Szirom and Sue Dyson
available from *Learning Development Aids*,
Cambridge. £9.95

THERE IS NOT exactly a huge choice of good books in the area of sexuality education. *Taught not Caught* aims to challenge sexism and heterosexism, and this can only be welcome in an area dominated by sexist and repressive values. The book could be very useful as a resource, but the problem is that it is teacher-centred.

Instead of learning arising from the experience and interests of the students themselves, the content or area of learning is chosen by the teacher. While some activities are open-ended, they are teacher-directed. In this sensitive and very personal situation, more than in other areas of learning, it is essential to begin from the student's starting point.

Some teaching strategies in the book are particularly primitive. For example, one activity involves giving half the people in the group a card with a problem concerning sexually-transmitted diseases and the other half a solution. People then have to move around the room and find

their partner.

This is basically a gimmick where the method of learning is completely extrinsic to what is to be learned and to the real-life conditions in which such knowledge might be sought. But there are some good and useful ideas. Another activity consists of a series of discussion sheets, with a paragraph on each which makes a statement that can form the basis of discussion.

Greater Expectations, which is basically a training course on gender awareness, can be criticised on the same sort of grounds. This book is concerned with sexism in all areas of life, rather than simply in personal relationships. It includes exercises in assertiveness training, as well as ideas for gaining knowledge of women at work, in education and so on.

It has the usual 'getting to know each other' games, and a heavy emphasis on self-analysis. It makes the assumption that participants who perform exercises in a very artificial setting will then transfer those learning experiences to real life attitudes and behaviour.

However, used selectively, both these books could provide valuable additions to a teacher's kit in an area very sparse on good material. Both contain extensive references to other materials, and could also be used directly by students themselves. They are certainly well worth having.

Strip Aids

A book by various cartoonists
Willyprods/Small Time Ink, pp56, £2.50

MANY CARTOONS to do with AIDS in the national press are in extremely poor taste. This book was inspired by one such cartoon. Some ninety cartoonists have contributed cartoons reflecting a positive attitude towards AIDS and they have been put together in this large format book to raise money for the London Lighthouse project, England's first residential and day-care centre for people affected by AIDS.

Emergency First Aid

A BBC Micro program on disc
available from *Screen Teach*, 21 Highlands
Road, Bamford, Rochdale, OL11 5PD. £6

LAST YEAR 60,000 people in Britain died suddenly from cardiac arrest, most of them at home. If they had received proper attention right away, it is reckoned that one third of the victims would have survived.

That attention consists of mouth-to-mouth breathing and chest compressions, to keep a supply of oxygen to the brain, until an ambulance arrives. This disc is useful in that it takes you through the procedure, step by step.

All too often, these days, computer assisted learning is seen as a replacement for real experience. Hopefully, this program will not be used in this way, but will be used as part of a course involving practical instruction (on a mannikin), as stressed in the accompanying notes.

Where Did I Come From

A book by P Mayle
Macmillan, £5.95

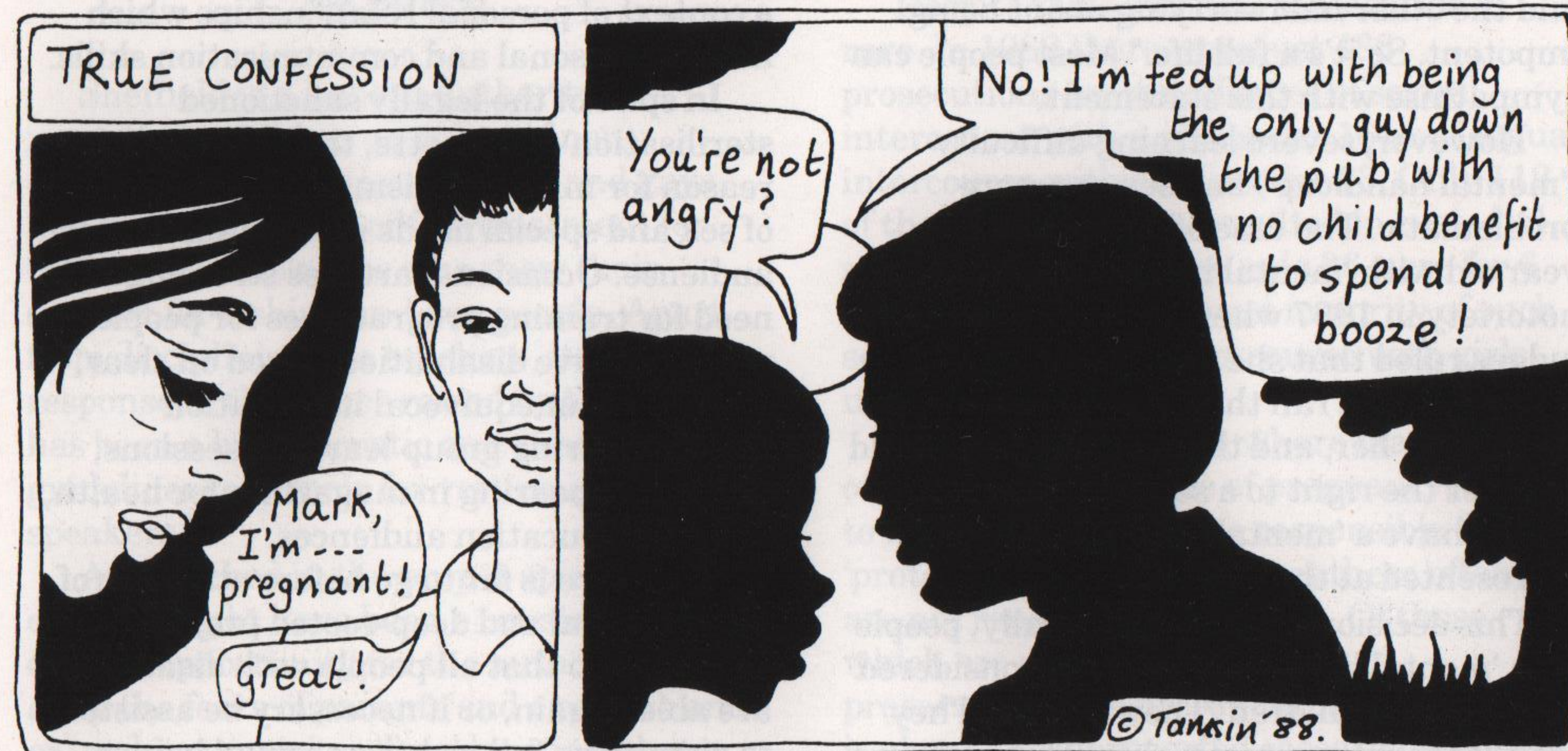
THIS introduction to the concept of sex is written and drawn for young children, and is fun as well as being fairly explicit. Its description of orgasm in terms of a "tickly sensation" is about as near as anybody ever got to describing the indescribable.

The emphasis is on reproduction, it doesn't deal with other aspects of sexuality. Literate infants and juniors will read, examine and re-read it avidly.

AIDS HIV:FACTS

An exhibition by the Photo Co-op, 61
Webbs Road, London, SW11 6RX
9 panels, £80 (or £30 per week hire)

THIS exhibition gives more than just facts, it presents a view of the seriousness of the spread of HIV, and why the 'AIDS panic' is unjustified. It deals with discrimination, drug addiction and health and safety issues without coyness. Where most official information has revolved around around fear and suspicion, this exhibition promotes a caring attitude. The human body is presented not as the object of disgust, but as something good, although vulnerable.



Sex for beginners

OF COURSE, only the Tories could do it. They effectively outlaw sex education in schools one minute, by giving governors the responsibility for it and offering a let-out clause to parents who might want their children removed from any classes where sex might be under consideration (The Education Act, 1986).

The next minute they turn volte face in the House of Commons by calling for "a complete consideration in schools of the threat and implications of AIDS" (Margaret Thatcher, Question Time, November 1986).

The government has no real, coherent policy about sex education. Rather it will invoke polemic and action about an issue that is central to young people's learning only when it decides public opinion demands it, or when it feels like launching a moral crusade.

Sadly, teachers in schools do not go much further. There is a vogue for developing courses in "Personal and Social Education", and for getting governors to endorse such courses. However, learning about sex and sexuality cannot take place once or twice a week, in large classes, with an embarrassed teacher displaying condoms and caps to even more embarrassed young people.

It is an issue that should, firstly, feature right the way across the curriculum and that, secondly, is dependent upon teachers sensitivity to the demands of young people and their desire to learn about sex and explore their own sexuality.

In this sense, if teachers should be demanding anything from governors, it should be encouragement for resources to be prepared and used in all subject areas. This should include the right to display material and make books, leaflets and useful addresses available, not for specific lessons in sex education, but where young people have real access to them - in classrooms and social areas in schools.

Good books about sex and sexuality are few and far between. The books we have selected are not necessarily aimed specifically at young people, but they do confront the issue head on, and should be of use to both teachers and young people.

The New Our Bodies Ourselves is a health book by and for women. Its size seems intimidating, but it is superbly illustrated and brilliantly written. *Mother and Baby* magazine demanded that, "every woman in the country be given a copy free of charge." Indeed, there should be a copy in every classroom in every school in the country.

It is a book which young people will come back to time and time again, with its exploration of the meaning and development of sexuality, its consideration and advice about birth control and abortion, and its support for women on issues of pregnancy, childbirth, health care and violence.

It is also one of the few books which specifically addresses women with disabilities, and offers perspectives about sexuality from women with a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

First Love, First Sex is similarly explicit and marvellously illustrated. It verges on the romantic at times, but doesn't just pay lip service to the concept of encouraging young people to explore their sexuality. It starts from the premise that young people will become sexually active, and offers positive and practical encouragement towards that end. There is, moreover, a challenge to heterosexism throughout the book, with lesbian and gay relationships being shown positively. (Will it last?)



Make it Happy and *Have you Started Yet?* are possibly the two best books available about puberty. *Make it Happy* is fun to read and not remotely embarrassing, even for those giggling thirteen and fourteen-year-old boys.

Have You Started Yet? challenges the assumption that young women should bottle up their feelings about puberty, and encourages them to share their feelings together. It also demands that male teachers look at the way in which they might avoid harassing and intimidating young women in schools, by being aware of their use of language.

Rose Shapiro's *Contraception: A Practical and Political Guide*, from Virago, is not the easiest book to read. It is probably too heavy for most young people, especially given its academic style. It is, though, a book that all teachers could benefit from reading, particularly those involved in the preparation of resources, and in the development of approaches to learning about contraception.

Pregnancy for beginners, on the other hand, is clear, simple and amusing. It offers an illustrated step-by-step guide to pregnancy, its problems and its implications. It is an absolute godsend for young women who are anxious about pregnancy and all that it might mean.

A survey of the best literature available for those interested in sex education would not be complete without some consideration of material about the HIV virus. *AIDS*, by Nigel Hawkes in the ISSUES series, is an excellent account of the history of the virus. It challenges all the homophobic and racist prejudices that flow out of the tabloid newspapers.

Moreover, it has excellent and explicit guides to safe sex practices, and stands in stark contrast to the boring, and mostly irrelevant, video that the DES has produced for use in schools.

Women and the AIDS Crisis considers at length the huge implications of "AIDS mania" for women, and demands that men don't just start to take responsibility for themselves now that they are under threat, but suggests and points the way to a transformation in sexual attitudes and relationships in general.

All these books have one thing in common - they are not packaged courses. On the contrary, they discuss issues relating to sex and sexuality. They should be of use to all teachers who are concerned about what issues to consider in relation to sex education, and in the main will prove attractive and informative to young people.

The New Our Bodies Ourselves
Boston Women's Health Collective
Penguin Books, pp568, £11.50.

First Love, First Sex
Kay Wellings
Thorsens Publishing, pp192, £6.99.

Make It Happy
J Cousins
Penguin Books, pp49, £2.95.

Have You Started Yet?
R Thompson
Pan, pp131, £1.95.

Contraception: A Practical and Political Guide
R Shapiro
Virago, pp218, £4.50.

Pregnancy for Beginners
T Gribben and D Frizzell
Sheldon Press, pp64, £2.95

AIDS.
N Hawkes
Aladdin Books, pp32, £5.95

Women and the AIDS Crisis.
D Richardson
Pandora, pp150, £3.95

Toys for the boys

Dear Lib Ed,

I read the article on toys in the 21st birthday issue with mounting irritation. Yes yes, we parents have got the message thanks, provide your child with old cardboard boxes, string, a few splintery bits of wood and your tools and you may relax in the knowledge that she will be totally absorbed in politically right-on, ecologically sound creative play.

This message has been rammed into this particular parent's ear ad nauseam by everybody from Blue Peter/Play School through Penelope Leach and the Pre-school Playgroups Association to Rudolph Steiner and Vegan Parents Against the Bomb. So now I am bent double under a heap of guilt when I commit the heresy of actually taking my six year old into a TOYSHOP and helping with the business of choosing a TOY (and what's more, it's usually made of plastic)!

Yes, I loathe the commercial battering of tiny children to buy, buy, buy, Transformers, My Little Pony etc etc., but my reaction is to act against that pressure quite openly, by explaining to my son what is going on, by watching children's television with him, by making my feelings quite clear to him.

The mainstream of my own fight back against the exploitation, sexism and racism of the toy manufacturers is a two pronged attack on them, and on the assumptions about 'normality' being fed to my own child.

I have a thick file of correspondence with toy manufacturers, toy shops, magazines and the Equal Opportunities Commission concerning the sexism of toy advertising. (There is nothing intrinsically sexist about a toy ironing board, it is the packaging, advertising and in-store display which get across the message that this is for girls.)

This pressure doesn't only come from me, and the results are, ever so slowly, beginning to be seen. Shops are less likely to divide toy displays by gender, (but they must NEVER be allowed to get away with doing so), the catalogues produced by companies like Lego and Playmobil are gradually becoming less sexist (though I will cheer aloud when I see a photo of a girl playing with Technic Lego!) and shops are beginning to sell Black dolls and to show Black kids in their advertising.

There's still a long way to go. Why do Playmobil sell their 'ethnic' figures only through the PPA or as pirates in the sets in shops? Why is it so difficult to buy jigsaw puzzles depicting kids from a variety of cultures? The pressure must be kept up!

The second prong of my attack is directed at my own child! For example, Lego is NOT sexist in itself, just in the fact that our assumptions echo those of the manufacturers in interpreting any little



yellow-faced person in charge of a digger as male, or as female if they happen to have long hair and be sitting in a little plastic house.

In point of fact, having a tiny yellow knob on top of your head does not define your gender, and the hats, hairstyles etc. are interchangeable IF we chose them to be so. So my small son was introduced to his first ever Lego figure, who happened to come with a motorbike and transporter, as "Jill Yellow-knob" and we referred to the two firemen he subsequently got as HE and SHE and called them firefighters.

He also has a boy baby doll with cot, clothes and penis, a Sindy doll who has all the usual Sindy accoutrements but who also goes scuba diving in a wet suit intended by the manufacturers for Action Man, and who frequently visits the moon in a space suit from the same source.

She has a tent and buggy and is VERY brave and adventurous, and her friend (actually Barbie's revolting 'Ken') has pink shirts, cuddly soft jumpers (knitted by me) and dance outfits (made from an old swimsuit) and does most of the cooking, usually managing to have a hot meal ready for Sindy when she gets back from underwater filming, climbing K2, or exploring new galaxies with She Ra and Swiftwind!

Playmobil too has been subverted. Our motorcycle cop is a woman, the astronauts are of both sexes, and we explain away the different hairstyles (when we don't actually manage to swap them round) by simply noticing that people DO have different hairstyles, men as well as women.

He has black Playmobil figures (courtesy of a friend who works in the PPA) and they have been made into doctors, nurses astronauts and parents. He has a black doll with a selection of clothes and a bed. He also knows that Mummy made the doll's bed and his dolls' house, so bang goes another sexist stereotype on the way.

Yes, it is hard work. It involves us both spending a lot of time actively playing with

him and feeding in counter-stereotypes. It is also often painful and difficult to support him when all this is contradicted by occasionally incredulous school friends.

It has to be backed up by our lifestyle, so it is his dad who teaches him to cook, me who teaches him woodwork etc etc.

But it is, to my mind, a thousand times better than denying him access to the huge range of stimulating toys on offer, making it even harder than it already is for him to relate to his peers, robbing him of the opportunities for imaginative role play and world-building which Lego, Sindy, Playmobil, Princesses of Power etc. offer, and condemning him to an impoverished existence sticking toilet roll middles together with PVA and fingerpainting egg boxes.

But don't send round the Libertarian thought police... we let him play with all that stuff too, honest!

Forbidding commercial toys, or making our disapproval so clear that we burden our children with guilt for wanting to play with them is not going to make the problem go away. What is needed is to subvert the stereotypes on offer creatively, and to consciously discuss with our kids the racism, sexism and commercialism we are fighting.

Yours in struggle,

Tamsin Wilton

Sir J.

To the Editor,
I read, with mounting irritation, the article Curriculum Cop, Killer in the rain, in the Spring '88 issue of Lib ED magazine. In future, kindly spell my name correctly or risk legal action.

Jeffrey Archer (Sir)