

## Groups and Resources

### Lib ED contacts

Bristol 0272-778453  
Nottingham 0949-60306 (distribution and subs)

### Education Now

PO Box 186, Ticknall, Derbyshire

### Summerhill School

Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY

### Buktu Resource Project

136 Grosvenor Road, Bristol BS2 8YA

### Liberation Network of People with Disabilities

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

### National Union of Students

461 Holloway Road, London N7  
071-272 8900

### Letterbox Library

8 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN  
071-254 1640

(Specialises in non-sexist and multi-cultural books for children. For details of their free catalogue, write or phone)

### Forest School Camps

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

### Woodcraft Folk

13 Ritherton Road, London SW17  
081-672 6031

(A kind of non-sexist, non-militarist scouts and brownies)

### Education Otherwise

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

### The Children's Home-Based Education Association

14 Basil Avenue, Armthorpe, Doncaster, DN3 2AT  
0302-833596

### Campaign Against Military Research On Campus (CAMROC)

190 Burdett Road, London E3 4AA  
081-980 2455

### New Education Directory

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

### Shocking Pink

Young Women's Magazine Collective, c/o 23 Tunstall Rd, Brixton London, SW9 8BZ  
(A 4 issue sub to this excellent magazine costs £2.40)

### All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism

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

### Bread'n'Roses/Tenants Corner

46a Oval Mansions, Vauxhall St., London SE11  
071-582 7286

(housing & education resource centre run by tenants)

### Scottish Civil Liberty Trust

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

### Children's Legal Centre

20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN  
071-359 6251

### Hummingbird Multicultural Resources

24 Ashley Hill, Bristol BS6 4JG  
0272-541946  
(publish mail order catalogue of books and other resources)

**Advisory Centre for Education**  
18 Victoria Park Square, London E2  
081-980 4596

### Minority Rights Group

29 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG  
071-930 6659

### Third World Publications

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

### Commonweal Collection

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

### Z to A Project (New University)

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

### Black and In Care

20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN  
071-226 7102

### Teachers for Animal Rights

c/o Wanda Dejlidko, 29 Lynwood Road, London SW17 8SB

### End Physical Punishment of Children (EPOCH)

PO Box 962, London N22 4UX  
(A national organisation which aims to end physical punishment of children by parents and other carers)

### National Union of Teachers

Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1  
071-388 6191

**Lesbian and Gay Workers in Education**  
BM Gayteacher, London WC1N 3XX

### A K Distribution

3 Balmoral Place, Stirling, FK8 2RD  
(Suppliers of a wide range of libertarian literature by post: send for their catalogue of titles)

### Global Futures Project

Institute of Education, University of London, 10 Woburn Square, London, WC1H 0NS

### Kilquhanity House School

Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland

### University of the Third Age

Wren Street, London WC1  
071-833 4747  
(Self-help learning groups for older people)

### Blackcurrent Otherwise Project

24 St Michaels Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ

### Skool Bus Project

24 Clive Street, Hereford, HR1 2SB

### Feminist Library

5/5a Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1

**We don't have room here for a comprehensive list of all schools, groups and resources available.**

**For that see our handbook, Freedom in Education - A d-i-y guide, advertised on page 14.**

## International

**The Children's Village School**  
Tombol, Wangdong, Amphoe, Muang, Kanchanaburi, 71190, Thailand

### National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools

58 Schoolhouse Rd, Summertown, TN38483, USA  
tel:615 964-3670

### City as School

16 Clarkson Street, New York, NY 10014, USA

### Foundation of Education with Production

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

### ANKUR

J-21, Hauz Khas Enclave, New Dehli 110016, India  
tel:661473

(Society for alternatives in education)

### Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Vidyalaya

Sawai Ram Singh Road, Jaipur-302 004, India

### Tamariki Free School

Woolston, Christchurch, New Zealand

### New Zealand Lib ED group

c/o Richard Bolstad, 26 Southampton Street, Christchurch, New Zealand

### SAC (Syndikalisterna)

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

### KRUT (Kritisk UtbildningsTidskrift)

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

### Frankfurt Free School

Vogelweidstrasse 3, Frankfurt, W. Germany

### Familial, Day Nursery Kindergarten School

PO Box 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal

### Grupo Impulso Libertario

CC984, 2000 Rosario, Argentina

### 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")

### Graine d'Ecole

La Paillerie, Avenue de Bardenac, 33600 PESSAC, France

### Circule-Air

Agence Informations Enfance, 29 rue Davy, 75017 Paris, France

tel: (1) 42-28-71-64

(an alternative education organisation and magazine)

### Assn. Nationale pour l'Education Nouvelle

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

### Connect

12 Brooke St., Northcote 3070, Victoria, Australia

### Acrobatic Arts Community School

PO Box 1101, Wodonga 3690, Australia

### Centro Studi Libertari

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

### CNT-AIT-Ensenyament

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

### CNT-Federacio d'Ensenyament de Catalunya

c/Roger de Lluria, 123 pral, 08037 Barcelona, Spain

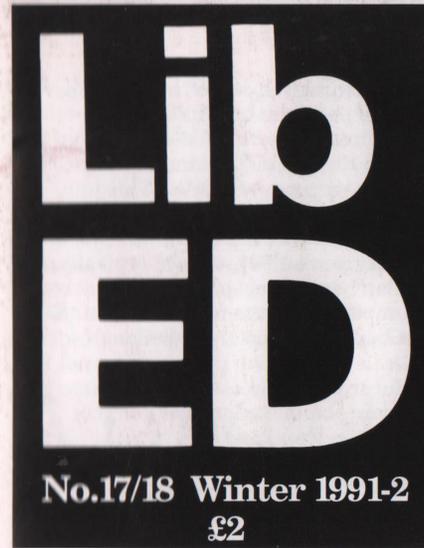
tel: 215-7625 (English spoken Tuesday mornings)  
(They publish "Alternative Teacher" (in English), news for foreign language teachers.)

### De Weide Free School

Sevekootstraat 67, Erpe-mere, Nr. Aalst, Belgium

### Free Schools in Vienna

c/o Davidgasse 6/15, 1100 Vienna, Austria



12087 L  
A magazine for the liberation of learning



**POPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN**  
*Special feature on children and war*



**A SCHOOL FOR THE NINETIES?**  
*We report on one of the new 'small schools'*

**PLUS:**

**BOYS - is emotional damage a price worth paying for social and economic power?**  
*1992 - a marriage of colonialists*

# Libertarian EDUCATION

A magazine for the liberation of learning

Vol 2 No 17/18 Winter 1991/92

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EDITORIAL

IT WAS three years ago that a small group of people determined that something needed to be done about Human Rights (in England, not in patronising tones about the Third World).

They were driven by a catalogue of excesses, a result of years of typically English benign neglect and a cosy assumption that the institutions of the past had always been good enough to make us Top Nation then, so why not in the future. The excesses had become all the more obvious after nine years of rule by the Iron Lady.

What was to be done about this? Much comparison had recently been made between the actions of the European Court, using the Convention on Human Rights, and our enlightened judiciary, using our own unwritten constitution and still a while away from the Guildford and Birmingham debacles.

So our band decided that what Britain needed was its own Human Rights Act, enshrined in a Charter that would declare the freedoms to which we were all entitled. They set up an organisation called Charter 88, and launched an appeal in the newspapers.

The Establishment was horrified. Mrs Hacksaw dismissed it out of hand. A challenge to the sovereignty of Parliament and the judiciary indeed! But in the pubs and back streets the murmurings were more appreciative. After all everybody is in favour of Rights. That's what you stand up for.

It was, well not acclaimed, but more half-heartedly recognised as a Good Thing, but one which we would never get because politics didn't work like that in Britain. And after all, Rights and Charters were things that foreigners had, and were a little tainted by connections with nasty things like revolutions and the EEC.

Oh, how the time flies by. Mrs Hacksaw was not even cold in her metaphorical grave when the cry went out. Major needs an identity, we must find one. And then a bright spark at Central Office must have seen the chord that Charter 88 had struck.

In a flash we have the Citizen's Charter, the Parent's Charter, the Patient's Charter, a surfeit, an overflowing of Charters. Glory be what a fortunate nation we are, to live in a land of Charters.

And the reality. As vacuous as the man himself. The Citizen's Charter is no more than a re-packaging of existing Little Man rhetoric. If the trains don't run on time because the line is too knackered, the engine has blown up and

the carriages are like something out the Flintstones, well tough luck on British Rail but they will be fined for not performing their duty. Of course this won't improve the service, as they'll have less money to spend on it, so it won't improve our lives. Just the pockets of the Moaning Minnies for whom the Charter was invented.

The same goes for the Parent's Charter (and note carefully that this is

it). The bad news was that the HMI were not going to do it. They've been a bit naughty recently. Like a lot of professional bodies they have been blowing the whistle (spreading false rumours) about the government's record. For instance about the City Technology Colleges who, despite the vast sums spent to set them up, do not have results to match their bank accounts.

## A land fit for charters

not a Student's or Children's Charter). In what way is this going to improve our schools? Will they get more money? No.

Instead what we have is a mish-mash of 'rights' that will aid middle class parents to ensure that their children get a half-decent education, and sod the rest. Let us look at a few of the 'rights' that have been granted to us.

The 'right' to choose a school for 'our' children. Baloney. Even with open school enrolment, schools (and especially good schools) become full very quickly. So they are forced to 'select' their pupils. And on what basis will this selection be made? Ability (exams)? Money (can you afford to live there)?

The 'right' to know how your school is 'performing'. It must be comforting to know that 'your' child is going to a 'good' school at the top of the league table. But if not, then what can you do about it? Exhortations won't repair a collapsed roof.

Will the government eventually introduce divisions? Even a Premier League? Will schools be tempted to pay the parents of bright children transfer fees in order to improve their league position? The mind boggles.

The point is that it is all beside the point. It is all image and no content. It is the exact equivalent of the 'feel good' politics that was introduced to the USA by the Great Comotose President, Reagan, and continued by his Vice. Never mind the truth. If the rhetoric is clear and 30% of the people feel good (and coincidentally rich), then nothing else matters. A society for the Brain Dead. You only need to look at the pictures of the Tory Party Conference for the evidence.

THERE WAS good news, and bad news, for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMI) recently. The good news was that the government was going to order that schools would be inspected much more frequently, every four years.

This was likened to a financial audit (quite appropriate for a government obsessed with money, and how to keep

So the government has decided to abolish the Inspectorate, or at least to change its role from actually inspecting to certifying independent firms of inspectors. The schools will then choose their own inspectors to perform the four-yearly 'audit'. This begs a few questions. Where are these firms going to miraculously come from? What training will be given to the new inspectors? How will the Inspectorate inspect the inspectors? Where is the money coming from (the budget is to be cut, but more inspections are to take place)?

The financial metaphor is quite appropriate actually. In The Real World what happens is that large corporations conspire with their auditors to produce a beautiful set of accounts that boost their share price, even if the business is collapsing. Ask the depositors of BCCI.

So we can expect a nice cosy relationship between schools and their 'auditors', providing that the rewards are high enough.

THERE IS something a little sickening about how, on the announcement of the new League Tables for schools, we were inundated by an avalanche of articles and features about "How to choose your best school".

I was going to say "Even the *Observer* succumbed to the mania", but if there is one thing that you can be sure of, it is that when the money's on the table, there will be a lot of screaming and shouting to get it. Presumably for some reason every newspaper believes that the people who are attractive to the advertisers are just the type of people to be interested in the kind of boring stereotyped (lively Head, good at sport) 'surveys' that we have seen.

THERE HAVE been a few interesting by-products of the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS), where schools have their own budgets and can spend the money as they please without

local government control.

One problem is that many schools, terrified after years of scraping by with buildings falling down and shortages reminiscent of Moscow, have underspent their budgets, some quite spectacularly.

This is probably partially due to a natural prudence, and partially gross inexperience. But one thing that most people know is that underspending is a

Bad Thing. If you haven't spent it this year, then you obviously won't need as much next year, so your budget will be cut.

However, there is a silver lining to all such stories. Several schools have come up with a good wheeze to get rid of the offending balance. They've raised the salaries of their glorious Headteachers. In line with the increases of other privatised industries of course.

AFTER a long struggle, it is necessary to report the death of the profession that was to be known as teaching. Years of attempting to turn teaching into a fully graduate career, with the status to match, have finally come to an end.

The latest suggestion has been to abolish the probationary year. Indeed one school tried to hire a school leaver to teach Mathematics this year, before being forced to withdraw the proposal after a furore. In addition, Fatty Clarke, the monster from the Fourth Remove, has suggested that teachers should forget learning about theory (you know stupid things like child psychology) and get down to learning about the really important things. Like how to keep discipline in class.

IT WAS good to see the government get back to basics recently. Having had a hard time at the hands of the professionals (again, haven't they abolished them all yet?) over the National Curriculum and Testing, they have realised that the whole thing was a conspiracy to defraud the public of what they really wanted. The 3Rs and written exams every year so that we can sort out the riff-raff and send them off to the mines.

Oh dear, though. They're abolishing the mines as well. Well, it looks like another boost for nanny and gardener advertising in *The Lady* again. Of course, you just can't find good tradesmen these days ...

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW ADDRESS:

Phoenix House  
170 Wells Road  
BRISTOL  
BS4 2AG

# Artists for arts sake

Too often artists are viewed as inhabiting an alien, elitist world, which has little connection with ordinary people's lives. Graham Wade looks at one way that an artist can make their work more accessible to the local community - by taking up a residency in a school.

OVER the last decade the number of artists finding placements or residencies in schools has risen steadily, although nobody not even the Arts Council - knows precisely how many there have been.

Informed guesses put the total at around 1,000 which still leaves the overwhelming majority of schools untouched by the various schemes on offer.

One of the most active brokers matching artists to schools is the Whitechapel Art Gallery, founded at the turn of the century by Canon Barnett as part of a three-pronged effort to bring education to the poor inhabitants of east London the other two were at Toynbee Hall and a public lending library.

At that time few artists lived or worked in the East End, but now the neighbourhood boasts the largest per capita concentration of urban artists anywhere in the world - a valuable resource that the gallery makes fullest use of in pursuing its extensive educational programme.

Since 1979 the Whitechapel has managed to place almost 50 artists in local schools and continues to do so at the rate of about seven a year.

## Philosophy

At the heart of the gallery's philosophy on artists in schools is its desire to make art as accessible as possible to the local community it was created to serve. Too often artists are viewed as inhabiting an alien, elitist world which has little connection with ordinary people's lives.

A recently published book, *Residencies in Education*, points out: "Placements work because contacts with artists take place within the familiarity of people's own surroundings rather than in what many find a threatening art environment.

"Being able to relate to what is going on encourages confidence about participating in the arts. Contact with an artist and their activity gives an insight into the artistic process and thus a greater understanding about art and artists"

Phil White, the Whitechapel's community education coordinator, oversees the delicate task of finding suitable artists for particular schools. There are more than 300 artists on the gallery's waiting list.

"In the four years I've been here

there's been only one case where a placement has proved problematic and that was when an artist was effectively left alone in the school, having to organise projects and getting the other staff interested. The school itself had problems, but it was ironed out in the end," he says.

A typical placement is for one term with the artist spending up to three days a week actually in the school. Pay is generally £70 a day plus another £500 or so to cover materials.

## Cost

At an average cost of about £3,000 for each placement, the gallery has to search far and wide for grants and sponsorship. The ILEA used to be the main supporter and its disappearance has led to problems of continuity in funding. Aldgate and Allhallows, a trust, and Tower Hamlets education department have both supported the gallery.

Phil White explains that any school must be fully committed to receive an artist. "We're not offering a supply teacher. We're offering someone with specific skills to make a contribution to a department that should be well defined."

Usually, after consultation with a school, the gallery selects up to half a dozen artists on its list and introduces them. They visit the school and then attend interviews.

"The school has to make a decision on the artist's personality as well as whether or not they like his or her work. Often the school's final choice agrees with ours," he says.

From the school's point of view, he reckons one of the most valuable contributions it can receive from the artist is fresh ideas. "The generation of ideas, the use of materials, the value of experiment, ways of working - not always end-products can be given to the school."

## Benefits

For the artist, the benefits can include the element of surprise and an insight into the learning process in schools. "The experience does affect artists' work. Kids by their very nature take risks which often surprise artists and that must be beneficial."

For artist-in-residence Zarina Bhimji, the experience of working at

Culloden primary school in Canning Town - now famous through the television documentary series - brought her much closer to a small group of Bengali-speaking girls.

They wrote together and drew as well as talked about their families. She discovered they weren't at all confident about themselves and she set about activities designed to correct this imbalance in their self-images.

"The issue turned out to be how they could be made to be comfortable with themselves - not just in a racial sense, that was merely an element. We explored what the face says. To begin with they were all quite inhibited."

But gradually this changed as trust built up between artist and students. Cramped, small handwriting slowly grew bigger and stronger. Portraits of themselves became more positive. Everyone opened up in a way that was impossible in the beginning.

## Critical Note

On a critical note, Phil White suggests that artists are still not made sufficient use of by departments in schools beyond the art class. He believes they have a strong contribution to make to geography, history and science as well as art.

Above all, artists in schools can transform the way children and teachers regard the art world. When he was the Whitechapel's director (before becoming head of the Tate), Nicholas Serota said: "One of the major faults of conventional museum education has been its reliance on art historians, rather than artists, as mediators of the work."

"We've found that the best person to talk about art in the gallery is an artist who is interested in the work on show and has sympathy for it. Artists make art to communicate."

Equally artists are good at explaining art in schools, if not better. And that is why the overall educational effort at the Whitechapel is based on a mixed approach of workshops for schools at the gallery, guided tours of exhibitions by artists and the placement of artists in schools.

*Residencies in Education - setting them up and making them work* is available from: **AN Publications**, PO Box 23, Sunderland SR4 6DG, price £6.75 (incl. p&p).



Local artists work with the children at Kilquhanity school

# A marriage of colonialists

A costly propaganda exercise is about to be launched. History is to be re-enacted midst pomp and revelry and good clean fun to orientate the new Europeans within the past and point them in the right direction for a future of peace, prosperity and freedom. But what of the swathes of European inhabitants who are under-resourced, marginalised and directly discriminated against? Rhys Evans asks whether we are learning the right history lessons for 1992.

MUCH OF the process of teaching and learning consists of building bridges between the agenda of those who are for the time being the students and those who are for the time being the teachers. Effective bridges enable a flow of communication and learning to take place between the two so that the roles of teacher and student become negotiable and interchangeable.

At best this way of relating between teacher and pupil can build a situation of trust in which either of the two can begin to envisage new ways of thinking which may be difficult or unpalatable, and experiment with the possibility of thought without cliché, slogan or comfortable generalisation.

Nevertheless teaching sometimes requires simplification and the breaking up of a process into easy steps, which may for a while distort. Moving from the simple to the complex and back again can be an uncomfortable part of the journey. Unfortunately it is all too easy to subvert this process.

Experienced teachers with an understanding of the situation and out-look of their students can simplify their messages about people and the

world in such a way that they create or confirm prejudice and reinforce stereotypes which students have acquired or inherited about the social and historical landscape in which they live.

Received history has always been full of potent symbols, whether it is the oral history of the Mayas of Guatemala or the written history of the British Empire with which most people over 40 in Britain today were served in school.

The history of a nation or a people or a movement enshrines its language and its myths and shapes its identity and its reason for existence. The search for objectivity and philosophical questions as to whether it is possible have engaged people for centuries.

Nowadays the daily historiography of the media, and especially the television, is a powerful force in creating the popular language and mythology which sustains our dominant social and economic structures.

Annual festivals and anniversaries of famous happenings help us to keep in mind the people and events which are the building blocks of our world. They are celebrated with public holidays,

exhibitions, parades or postage stamps. Sometimes a dominant regime will wish to suppress a public event, like May Day perhaps, because it runs counter to its own orthodoxy.

History teaching in this country, for those under 40, has seen a change of emphasis. It has tried to avoid the pitfall of orthodoxy and chauvinism by focusing first on the local community and the immediate experience of the student, and secondly on the international community.

Now, very recently, the pendulum has swung back. Our own nation-state and its role in the history of Europe and the world is again the main item on the historical agenda.

The builders of national curricula, both here and in other European countries, have chosen the year 1992 to be the historical monument, the fifth centenary of Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas, placed at the crossroads between Europe's half-millennial adolescence as a group of warring colonial empires and its future maturity as a single, dominant world economic and military power.

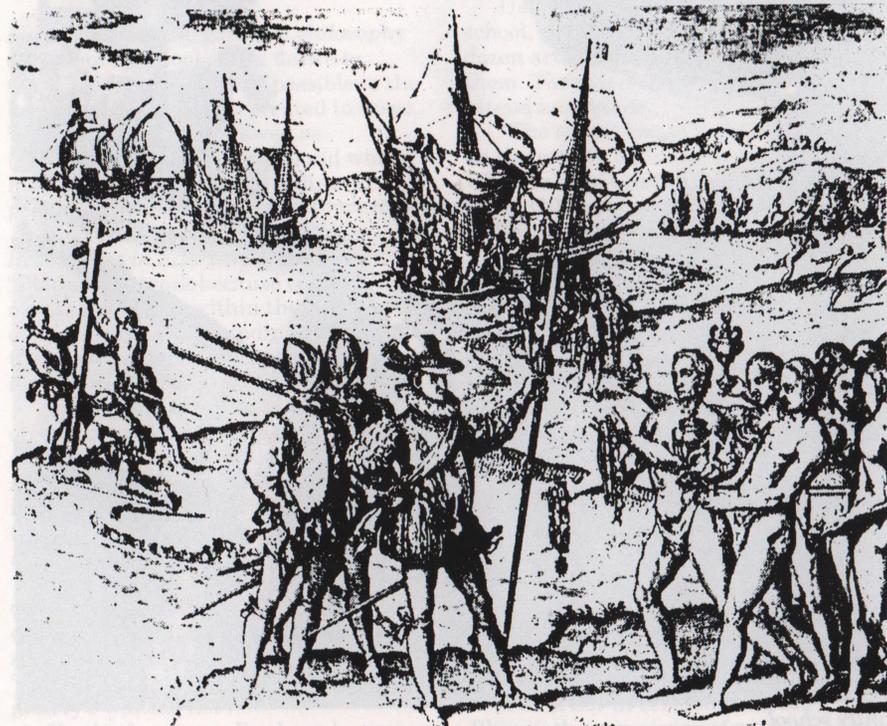
Spain is celebrating 1992 as the quincentenary of a "meeting of two cultures" which took place on October 12th 1492. It is accompanied by the massive *Expo 92*, the Olympic Games, the culmination of plans for high-speed trains and national motorways.

A flotilla will travel between the old world and the new, visiting Santo Domingo, Cadiz and Liverpool as part of the itinerary, the latter because of its importance in the triangular trade which brought such wealth to our shores. A symbolic marriage has been arranged between the Statue of Liberty in New York and the Statue of Columbus in Barcelona.

Birmingham has put some tens of thousands of pounds into its unique contribution -- the wedding ring. Other cities in Europe are contributing in like manner.

In 1992, very much in the same way as the Mystery Plays of the European Middle Ages, history will be re-enacted, amidst pomp and revelry and good, clean fun, to orientate the new Europeans within the landscape of their past and point them in the right direction for a future of peace, prosperity and freedom.

The degree of deliberate, criminal



*American Express: that will do nicely, Mr Columbus.*



*Liberty: Now you see her, now you don't.*

obfuscation involved in this immorally costly propaganda exercise hardly needs to be pointed out. The immigration laws and the conventions on refugees and migrants within Europe are racial and confrontational.

Only lip-service is paid to any kind of institutional multiculturalism. Unemployment and homelessness are rife. Swathes of the inhabitants of Europe are under-resourced, marginalised and directly discriminated against.

International trade agreements make the gaps between rich and poor in the world wider, and there are no government strategies in any European country for applying more than tiny poultices to the human haemorrhage that is taking place.

So how should teachers deal with 1992? A danger would be to start rewriting history yet again so that it contained the contrary propaganda, the

contrary clichés, the contrary set of comforting analyses.

In this way the contents might change, but the methodology and pedagogy would remain the same: the teacher still as the purveyor of quintessences, though a rebel rather than a conformist; still the ideologue on the platform, though wearing jeans instead of a gown.

Arguably all theory requires a degree of generalisation, but didactic pedagogy often means encouraging a retreat from the complex to the simple. Whereas, as I have suggested, it is far more painful and exposing to make learning leap from the simple to the complex, and thus back and forth, so that all the time thinking refines perception and perception refines thinking.

If teaching and learning are between them the bridge-building process it was suggested they were at the start of this

piece, then 1992 is no more or less a part of this process than any other agenda for learning.

Implicit in the learning dialogue is the continuous negotiation of values which underpins the interpretation of history and society. The potent symbol of 1992 contains a structure of values which need to be dissected and examined and understood.

The story of Columbus' voyage, the issue of immigration law, the plight of unemployed agricultural workers in Southern Spain may or may not be of interest to certain people at certain times in their lives, but justice, loyalty, exploitation, treachery arguably always will.

This is not an argument as to whether spelling and arithmetic and geographical or historical 'facts' are important or not: it is an argument about what our methods are and above all what our starting point is.

# I'd rather be a crocodile

Wes Webb asks what do we do when young men decide that the emotional damage done to them by sexism is a price worth paying for the social and economic power it gives them.

TWO STORIES from me: you can doubtless add many of your own on the same theme.

In bringing up my own kids, I tried hard to create a non-sexist environment. When the first, male, came along, we banned any kind of war toy. At the age of around 15 months, just learning to talk, Jake used to play with a toy/fruit, which he named "gunana".

More recently, working as an English teacher in a secondary school, I

if any of the boys would prefer to be female, they couldn't admit it - they'd instantly be called 'bender' or 'queer', which they all agreed was the ultimate insult, and on a par with 'slag' for women.

They flip-charted the good things about being male; they had a list of 18, most of them about power, social and economic, and freedom. When I asked them, as the next task, to predict what the girls were listing next door about being female, the boys had to scratch

unsettled the group considerably. Three of the most macho boys in particular, who were never easy to handle, became bloody impossible, and were extremely verbally violent to the more articulate girls, and to me. They were clearly very threatened.

In her review of *Boys will be ... ?* (Lib ED 19) Tamsin Wilton wrote about her work with sixth-form students: "The girls had obviously benefited from the influence of feminism on their schooling. The boys, on the other hand, were cultural throwbacks, proto Andy Capps."

So how do we put masculinity on the educational agenda? It seems to me a particularly critical time, since one idea of 'masculinity' is currently sweeping the United States (the Iron John movement), and doubtless about to hit here too.

There have been five 'Men's Studies' books published this year in the States, and there are fifteen in preparation for next year. Men are trooping off for weekends in the woods, getting in touch with their 'real', 'wild' selves; there is a very popular theory that men have been emasculated by the woman's movement, and need to re-assert their maleness.

In a context like this, we need to be very careful about men's and boy's groups. I agree whole-heartedly with Tamsin Wilton when she writes about "the misery and harm inflicted on young men by growing up in a deeply sexist society", but I share the suspicions of a lot of my feminist friends that men's groups are attempting to re-write the definition of sexism as something that damages men and women equally.

It's important not to lose sight of a definition that sexism is the oppression of women by men, even if we want to explore what that sexism does to men too.

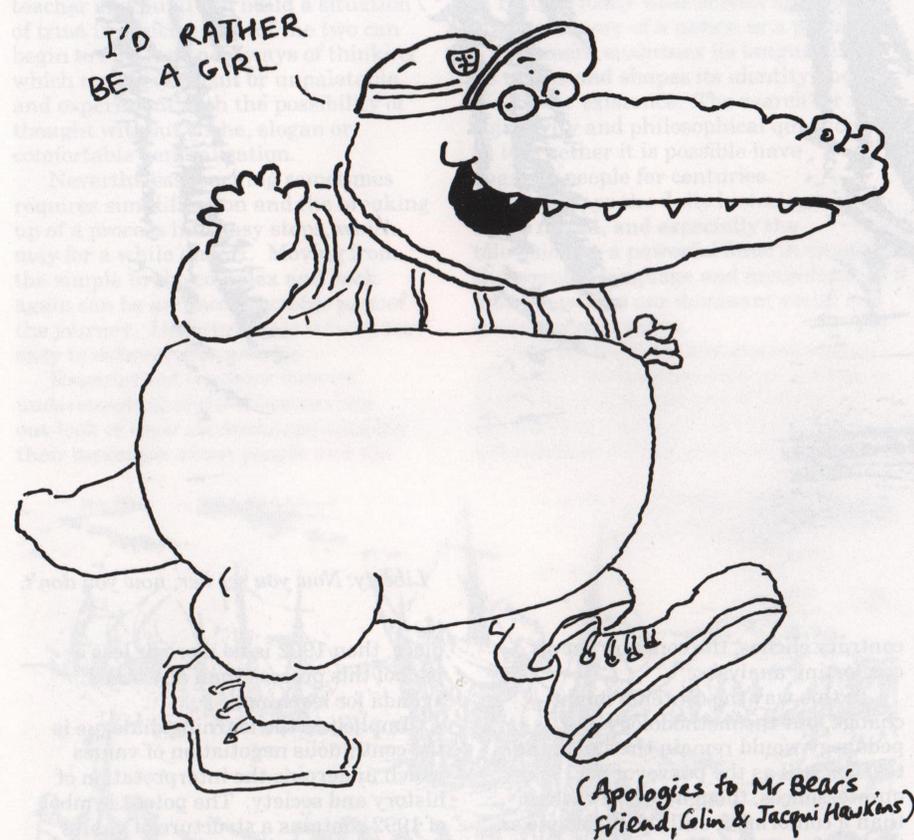
Whatever the dangers, I think we have to look at working with boys, and finding ways of supporting them in exploring their maleness. Attempting to make our school a non-sexist environment is not enough - a necessary but not sufficient condition. We need to look how girls' groups have worked, and learn from the work that is happening (though not much) in the youth service.

But what we do, if like my 10 boys, and I suspect lots of men, our young men decide that the emotional damage done to them by sexism is a price worth paying for the social and economic power it gives them? It may not be quite the dessert you wanted, but when you can have your fruit and shoot it ... ?

hard to find 4 things - close relationship with babies, more likely to be believed by adults, less trouble with the Law, and not having to fight - and this was a total, not an agreed, list of ideas.

It took a lot of talking before some of the boys were prepared to admit that they, too, were caught in the gender trap, and that there was enormous pressure to conform to a macho image, to be 'hard', to be 'one of the lads'. Most of them seemed to feel, though, that it was a price worth paying.

I'd hesitated long before tackling this work with this far from easy group. The initial session was fine, but it



ran a unit of work with my year 10 group around sexism, which I'd called the Gender Trap. With the help of a female colleague, we split into gender groups, and I was getting the boys to identify what they felt was good/positive and bad/negative about being male.

One of my inputs - I didn't need many; they had plenty to say - was to refer to work done with younger kids, asking the question "would you rather be a boy or a girl?"

"I'd rather be a crocodile!" was Michael's instant response. Much sympathetic laughter.

We talked about the fact that, even

# Illich, ego and anarchism

All too often, Ivan Illich is linked with the acute individualism of anarchists such as Max Stirner, rather than the more social anarchists like Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman. Apart from being misleading, this association is also used by critics to dismiss entirely his deschooling thesis. Clive Baldwin examines the similarities and differences between Illich's writing and those of three strands of anarchism: anarcho-communism; anarcho-syndicalism; and here, in the first of three articles, anarchist individualism.

ALTHOUGH Illich is almost always described in the literature as an educational radical the links between his thought and that of the anarchist tradition are not so frequently stated. This distinction is given name by Michael Smith in his book *The Libertarians and Education*<sup>1</sup>. There, he describes it as a distinction between libertarians of the position and libertarians of the movement. The first is identifiable by three prime distinguishing characteristics:

"... belief in a non-coercive pedagogy, interest in 'natural' learning based upon 'natural' motivation, and a concern about the child's capacity to resist an ideology imposed upon him through the school".<sup>2</sup>

These three characteristics are obviously interlinked for example a non-coercive pedagogy follows from an interest in natural learning and motivation and the concern about the child's capacity to resist an imposed ideology.

The libertarian movement differs from the above in the following way:

"The movement can be seen to some extent as an association of individuals to promote these (the characteristics of the position) views. But ... (it) ... has also had ... a marked political connotation ... Its history is, therefore, intertwined with the history of socialist thinking in general. In particular, with its pronounced anti-authoritarian cast, it has reflected the ideals of the anarchists".<sup>3</sup>

The association with Illich with simply the libertarian position outlined above is, I believe, at once an oversight on the part of his critics who, in attempting to defend schooling from his attacks (which more often than not they take seriously), read him only superficially and, secondly, due to the nature of Illich's style. As to the first, Illich can hardly be held to blame. As to the second he is more obviously culpable.

The first problem is understandable for, standing alone, the libertarian position is relatively easy to attack. It could be, and has been,<sup>4</sup> argued that the libertarian faith in natural motivation is misplaced - simply consider any of the literature on mainstream teaching and how to motivate children - that children need to learn some things which while not immediately attractive are necessary;<sup>5</sup> and that schools do not impose an ideology but rather prepare children for the responsible use of

freedom when they leave.

It can also be criticised, by those who do not hold to the status quo as well as those who do, on the grounds of being isolated from social realities - in the case of the former, realities of injustice, oppression, power and wider societal change; in the case of the latter of abdicating adult responsibilities for the preparation of children for their future role in society.

In the end such arguments tend to degenerate into a puerile disagreement over human nature with one side pronouncing faith in natural goodness, the other in natural waywardness.

Any superficial reading of Illich's work will satisfy the reader that he is certainly a libertarian of the position. His main concern would seem to be the imposition of an ideology (of whatever political persuasion) onto individuals through the hidden curriculum of schooling as evidenced by the following:

"We are rather concerned to call attention to the fact that the ceremonial or ritual of schooling itself constitutes such a hidden curriculum ... Inevitably, this hidden curriculum of schooling adds prejudice and guilt to the discrimination which a society practises against some of its members, and compounds the privileges of others with a new title to condescend to the majority. Just as inevitably, this hidden curriculum serves as a ritual of initiation into a growth-oriented consumer society for rich and poor alike."<sup>6</sup>

While a non-coercive pedagogy follows directly from his condemnation of the hidden curriculum, less overt is his interest in natural learning and motivation though it would seem to be taken for granted throughout his work. For example, in putting forward his four networks he assumes that people will want to use any or all of them to learn, simply by proposing them as voluntary associations.

The second problem, the one of Illich's style, also helps to obscure the roots and influences on the deschooling thesis. It is evident, even in reading his more accessible works, that Illich makes little concession to his readers. As Sumner Rosen says:

"The brilliance of his writing, its epigrammatic and paradoxical weight, poses as obstacle for some. He writes a paragraph where others need pages, a phrase where others need a paragraph. Often the sparks seem to take on a life of their own and to be more distracting than illuminating. He often maps

different but converging approaches to his target rather than building a reasoned argument that enables the reader to isolate and deal with the stages of analysis ... In *Deschooling Society* he does not marshal evidence in the usual way, but piles image on image to portray the present system of schooling ...<sup>7</sup>

## “Schools have lost their unquestioned claim to educational legitimacy”

As is indicated above, unlike most academic books Illich's text pays little, if any, homage to convention. His text does not flow easily from contention to argument to example but flies from one point to another leaving the reader to decide as to whether what s/he is reading is empirical fact, metaphysical truth, philosophical argument, prophecy, ideological rhetoric or simply pure whim. Witness the following quotes:

“Schools have lost their unquestioned claim to educational legitimacy.”<sup>8</sup>

“And the liberal institution of compulsory schooling permits the well-schooled to impute to the lagging consumer of knowledge the guilt for holding a certificate of lower denomination, thereby rationalising through a rhetorical populism that is becoming increasingly hard to square with the facts.”<sup>9</sup>

“Hopeful trust and classical irony (eironeia) must conspire to expose the Promethean fallacy.”<sup>10</sup>

“In the name of God we must denounce the idolatry of progress and the polluting escalation of production. We must expose the pseudo-theology of education as preparation for a life of frustrating consumption.”<sup>11</sup>

“All children have been schooled to the belief in rising expectations and can now rationalise their growing frustration outside school by accepting their rejection from scholastic grace. They are excluded from Heaven because, once baptised, they did not go to church. Born in original sin, they are baptised into first grade, but go to

Gehenna (which in Hebrew means ‘slum’) because of their personal faults.

As Max Weber traced the social effects of the belief that salvation belonged to those who accumulated wealth, we can now observe that grace is reserved for those who accumulate years in school.”<sup>12</sup>

Such stylistic ambiguity, though adding to the affective impact of the text, causes obvious confusion. It does not, therefore, make it easy for the reader to determine how seriously one should take its content.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, Illich says nothing of his sources. In the majority of his specifically educational writings he uses no footnotes, indicates no sources or influences. This, according to Piveteau<sup>14</sup>, is one of the reasons that his critics find him so irksome for it is impossible in these circumstances to carry on a dialogue with him as the reader can when such notation is provided.

This enables his critics to focus on his style as being indicative of his content and thus avoid facing the challenge that he so evidently makes. For example, in a rather dismissive article, Musgrave says that Illich is “helped by the fact that he is really writing as a prophet; that is, he has a message of inspiration, which he expresses, often illogically, in rather metaphorical or repetitious language” and later, “Prophets do not cite footnotes...”<sup>15</sup>

It is also true that it is easier to dismiss individual prophets than whole traditions.

Thus, while Illich is linked solely with the libertarian position it is easier for his critics to dismiss what he says.

## “In the name of God we must denounce the idolatry of progress and the polluting escalation of production”

However, if one makes the effort to establish what it is that Illich is saying, and how, and with a more open mind than some of his critics have done it is possible to determine sources and influences on Illich and thus less easy to dismiss what he has to say.

Indeed some writers have already

done this, pointing out that while Illich is not saying anything particularly new<sup>16</sup> he stands within a long tradition of anarchist educational thought.

This ‘location’ within the anarchist tradition, as noted above, has been stated by some authors but as far as I am aware only Hedman has made a particular attempt to differentiate the strand of anarchist thought into which Illich fits.<sup>17</sup> Even those sympathetic towards Illich have failed to make this differentiation which, I believe, is so important to the furthering of the deschooling thesis.

All too often Illich is linked with the acute individualism of anarchists such as Stirner rather than the more social anarchists like Kropotkin and Goldman. This simplistic association is misleading

## “We must expose the pseudo-theology of education as preparation for a life of frustrating consumption”

and is also used by critics to dismiss entirely the deschooling thesis.

It is my contention here that that thesis belongs more appropriately within the latter tradition and that it finds its strongest position and arguments when thus located.

Consequently, I will examine briefly the similarities and differences between Illich's writings and those of three strands within anarchism - anarchist individualism as expounded by Max Stirner; anarcho-communism as exemplified in the writings of Peter Kropotkin; and anarcho-syndicalism as represented by Emma Goldman.

It will be seen that it is within the tradition of the latter two that Illich is more constructively and appropriately located.<sup>18</sup>

Several authors have criticised Illich for what they see as an extreme individualistic approach both to societal analysis and prescription.<sup>19</sup> In some ways this is understandable, witness the following remarks by Illich:

“The learner must be guaranteed his freedom without guaranteeing to society what learning he will acquire and hold as his own. Each man must be guaranteed privacy in learning, with the hope that he will assume the obligation of helping others to grow into uniqueness.”<sup>20</sup>

“It (the emerging counter-culture) values the unpredictable outcome of self-chosen personal encounter above the certified quality of professional instruction. This reorientation towards personal surprise rather than institutionally engineered values will be disruptive of the established order ...”<sup>21</sup>

This, however, is not the entire story. Briefly reviewing the anarchist individualism of Max Stirner I will attempt to show that while there are similarities in analysis of the problem the two diverge when it comes to prescription.

The position of anarchist individualism is probably best expressed by Max Stirner in his works *The Ego and Its Own* and *The False Principle of Our Education*.<sup>22</sup> Building on the ideas of Rousseau with regard to the individual's autonomy, Stirner argued against allegiance to any absolute standard outside the individual. For example:

“I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this ‘human society’, I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilise it;”<sup>23</sup>

This he called “the ownership of the self”. For Stirner, this necessitated the abolition of any and every authority, especially that manifested in the school. In this, Stirner distinguished between the free person and the educated one. For the free person knowledge was used in order to choose in acts of the will; for the educated one, knowledge was used to shape character (which would necessarily be in the interests of the State) and thus would create what he termed “wheels in your head”. Consider Stirner's statements:

“... then the freemen will incessantly go on to free themselves; if, on the contrary, one only educates them, then they will at all times accommodate themselves to circumstances in the most highly educated and elegant manner and degenerate into subservient and cringing souls.”<sup>24</sup>

“... only scholars come out of the menageries of the humanists, only ‘useful citizens’ out of those of the realists, both of whom are indeed nothing but subservient people.”<sup>25</sup>

and:

“Most college students are living examples of this sad turn of events. Trained in the most excellent manner they go on in training; drilled, they continue drilling.”<sup>26</sup>

“... education, as a power, raised him who possessed it over the weak, who lacked it, and the educated man counted ... as the mighty, the powerful, the

imposing one: for he was an authority.”<sup>27</sup>

These points - that education promotes subservient people, that training and drilling are ‘addictive’ and that education raises one person over

## “Schools have alienated man from his learning”

the other in a power relationship are echoed strikingly by Illich:

“... once we have learned to need school, all our activities tend to take the shape of client relationships to other specialised institutions ... once young people have allowed their imaginations to be formed by curricular instruction, they are conditioned to institutional planning of every sort.”<sup>28</sup>

“Schools have alienated man from his learning.”<sup>29</sup>

“School initiates, too, the Myth of Unending Consumption. This modern myth is grounded in the belief that process inevitably produces something of value and, therefore, production necessarily produces demand. School teaches us that instruction produces learning. The existence of schools produces the demand for schooling.”<sup>30</sup>

and:

### NOTES

1. Smith, M. P., *The Libertarians and Education*, 1983, Unwin Education Books, London.
2. *ibid*, p.16.
3. *ibid*, p.16.
4. cf. Rafferty, M., in *Summerhill: For and Against*, pp.11-25.
5. cf. Peters, R. S., *The Philosophy of Education*.
6. Illich, I., *Deschooling Society*, p.39, 1973, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
7. Rosen, S., *Taking Illich Seriously*, in *Social Policy*, March/April 1972, pp. 41-46.
8. Illich, I., *After Deschooling, What?*, p.32, Writers and Readers, 1974.
9. *ibid*, p.34.
10. *Deschooling Society*, p.115.
11. Illich, I., *Education as Idol*, in *Religious Education*, p.418.
12. *Deschooling Society*, pp.49-50.
13. *ibid*.
14. Piveteau, D. J., *Illich: Enemy of Schools or School Systems?* in *School Review*, May 1974, pp.393-411.
15. Musgrave, P. W., *The Educational Illusions of Illich*, in *Farewell to Schools*, ed. Levine and Havighurst.
16. *ibid*, p.

“The man addicted to being taught seeks his security in compulsive teaching. The woman who experiences her knowledge as the result of a process wants to reproduce it in others.”<sup>31</sup>

“In these countries the majority is already hooked on school, that is, they are schooled in a sense of inferiority towards the better schooled;”<sup>32</sup>

From the above it should be obvious that Illich and Stirner have some things in common. However, it is at the level of prescription that Illich takes his leave from Stirner, preferring a more social solution to the problem. For Stirner, the solution is to establish a society of egoists owing only allegiance to oneself. For Illich, the solution comes from collective and participatory action. This is illustrated in the following:

“The complement to a durable, repairable and re-usable bill of goods is not an increase of institutionally produced services, but rather an institutional framework which constantly educates to action, participation and self-help”<sup>33</sup>

and:

“Our political imagination is now challenged to find a process by which a commitment to personal austerity, to voluntary poverty can be translated into democratically enforceable programmes. Unfortunately since the time of Stalin it has been difficult to claim the socialist label for such politics.”<sup>34</sup>

**Next issue: ‘Participatory socialism’**

# Lies, all lies and nothing but lies

**8.30 am** A working breakfast with Boss Clarke. In between kippers, he tells me about plans for his memoirs. His publishers have suggested a number of titles, all relating to various triumphs in his career. My favourite is **FUCK OFF AND DIE** which centres on his successes as Health Secretary, but he is more inclined to **IGNORANCE IS BLISS, I SENT MY KIDS TO PUBLIC SCHOOL** or **NO APPLE FOR THE TEACHER**, dealing with his years as Education Secretary.

**10.00 am** Urgent phone call. I have to rush across to the cabinet office where one of our junior ministers, Tim Eggar, is undergoing his annual **TRUTH DETECTOR TEST**. Young Tim is apparently close to equalling Boss Baker's perfect score of a few years back.

I remember the occasion well. Despite days of relentless questioning by skilled interrogators like Robin Day, Jeremy Paxman and Jimmy Savile, Boss Baker never gave a single truthful answer.

He wouldn't even admit who he was, let alone give anything away about education policy. This performance had brought him instant promotion to Party Chairman and now, of course, he is in charge of wrecking the prison system prior to privatisation.

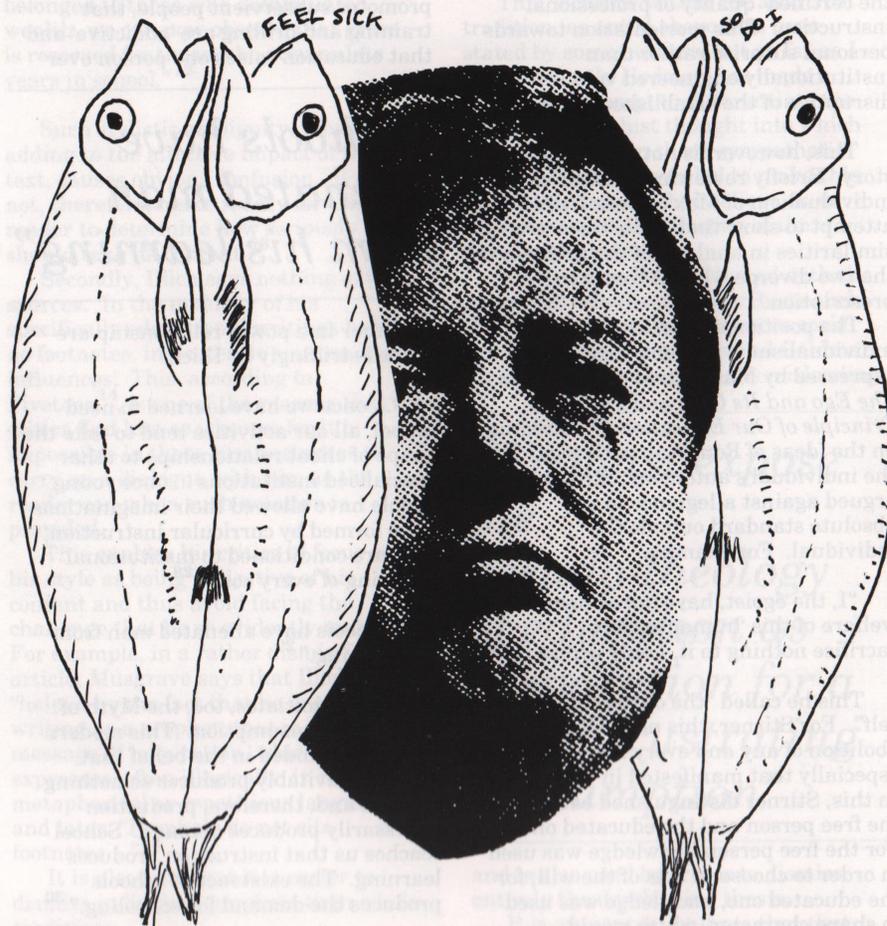
One problem with Boss Baker's marvellous performance had been the hours it had taken to clean off the layers of grease he'd left on the machine. I've still got a pot of it at home.

I go in and see Eggar busy answering questions. After ten minutes of listening, I turn to Bernie Ingham who is monitoring the truth detector. "It's no good, Bernie," I say, "he's not lying."

"What do you mean he's not lying. After three days he still hasn't told the truth about any of our education policies. Testing, teacher shortages, opting out, class size, City Technology Colleges, evening classes, higher education, he's lied about them all."

"Oh, I know all that, Bernie. The trouble is he's not actually lying. The stupid sod doesn't know any of the right answers. I'm afraid he's a bit of a pillock. Chancellor of the Exchequer material really."

"But he went to Oxford."  
I laughed. "Well now you know what an Oxymoron is, Bernie. I'm afraid Boss Baker's record still stands. I don't suppose we'll ever find someone as glib, slimy, two faced and downright dishonest as him. He was a real politician. It was a pleasure to work for him."



Kenneth Clarke between kippers

**12.00 noon** Visit the prestigious London Orifice School where the Governors have just voted the headteacher, Roger Greed a £250,000 pay rise. He invites me into his luxurious office overlooking the Thames and we admire the view while sipping champagne.

"How did the teachers take your pay rise? Were there any objections?" I ask.

"None at all." He laughed, "We had the staff toilets redecorated and gave them half a dozen new chairs in the staffroom. That seemed to keep them happy. You know what gutless, spineless scum they are. Most of them think that I deserve it. They accept that heads are a superior breed and get on with the job."

We both laugh.  
"Good, good," I say after a while.  
"One other thing though. Isn't your office a little far away from the school? About fifteen miles, isn't it?"

"Seventeen, actually. But don't worry about that old boy. I bung the deputy head a couple of thou' to look after the place for me. Good chaps they are, sell their souls for a few bob."

"Wouldn't they all," I reply.

**2.00 pm** I rush in to see the Boss and show him the latest issue of that evil, subversive anarchist newspaper, **CLASSROOM WAR**. In the latest issue there is a vicious attack on him. It says: **BOSS CLARKE IS A FAT GRAMMAR SCHOOL BULLY WHO HAS CONTEMPT FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE AND COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT STATE EDUCATION**

"It's outrageous, Boss. We can't let them get away with it. What do you want me to do?"

"Don't bother me with this crap," he replied stuffing a whole chicken into his mouth. "Most of the proles are either too pissed or too thick to care one way or the other. And anyway who gives a toss about state education? Now get out before I give your bottom a good caning. I haven't finished lunch yet."

**Next issue:** Boss Clarke returns from a trip to Japan full of exciting new ideas for reforming education yet again this year. But will British teachers accept compulsory suicide if they fail appraisal being written into their contracts? Of course they will!

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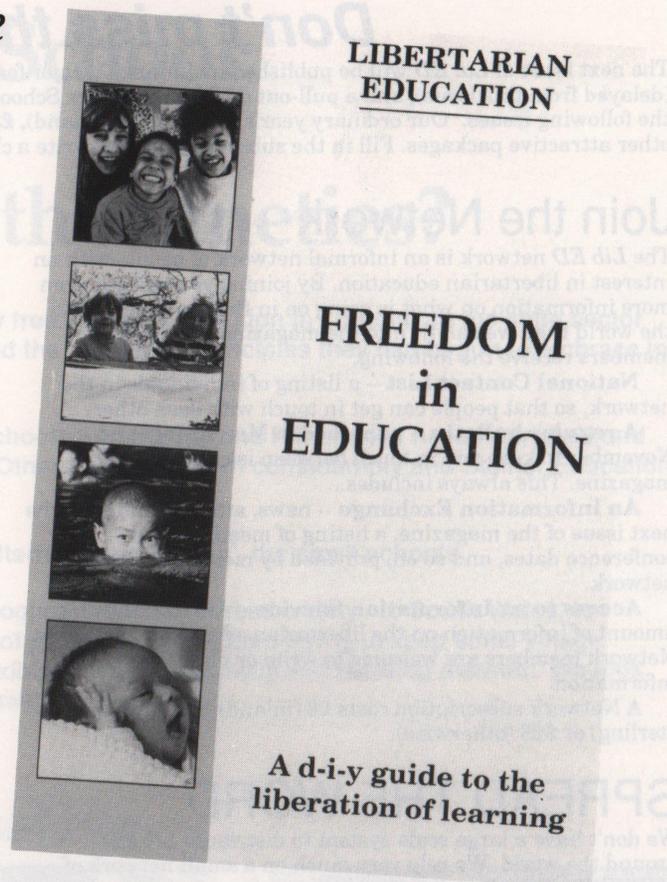
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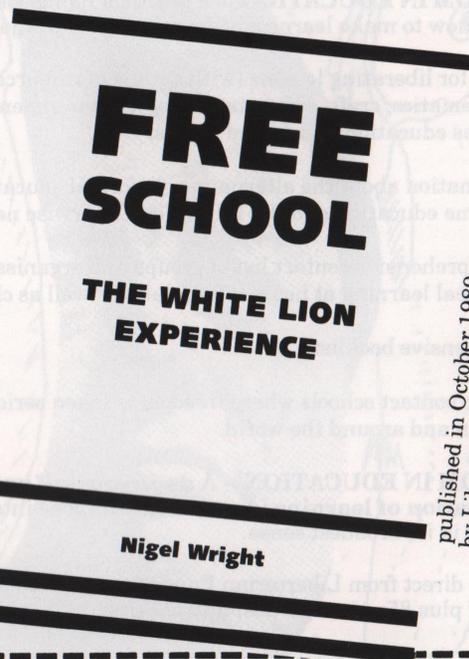
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# Dame Catherine's School:

## A small school for the nineties?

Last year saw the closure of the one remaining inner city free school, White Lion in London. In the state sector many schools have turned the clock back and abandoned the libertarian principles they had begun to embrace in the more progressive climate of the 1970s.

However, all has not been lost. The libertarian private schools Summerhill and Kilquhanity have flourished and have recently been joined by Sands School. Education Otherwise has grown considerably and Steiner Education is on the increase too.

*Lib ED* now looks at another important growth area of 'alternative education', the small schools.

Born in Hartland, Devon in the early 1980s the small school concept has spread widely - to South Wales, to Liverpool, to Derbyshire. Mostly it has involved groups of parents and teachers trying to keep small village schools open at the same time as trying to develop a flexible and open teaching and learning method. We look here at one of those schools - Dame Catherine's in Ticknall, Derbyshire.

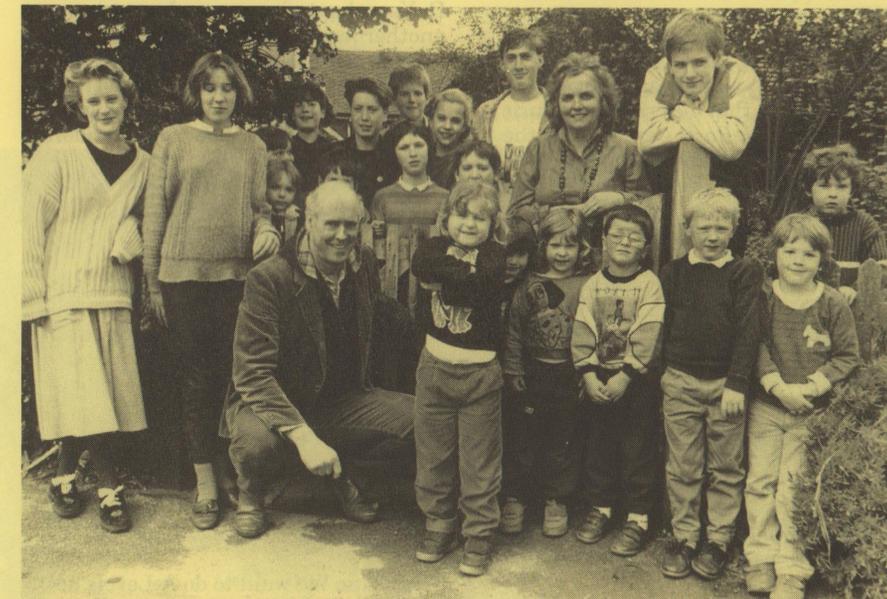
### The Birth Of An Alternative

DAME CATHERINE'S school was born out of a disaster for the local village community in Ticknall, Derbyshire. The school in the village was closed by the Local Education Authority in the summer of 1987. For some time numbers had been falling. The official wisdom was that schools had to be of a certain size to be able to meet the needs of the children.

When the school closed there were nine children of primary school age attending. A head teacher with some part-time help had been put in for one year by the Local Education Authority to preside over the closure of the Voluntary Controlled Parochial Primary School. The attempt by the Local Education Authority to provide a school in Ticknall since 1953 was over.

Some parents and local people were angry. They consulted the Human Scale Education Movement. Their advice was that they should find out who owned the buildings. If the buildings belonged to an older authority than the local council there might be a chance that they could continue to run a school themselves.

Like so many of the village school buildings which have been sold off to private individuals as country dwellings, the Ticknall school was the property of an ancient educational charity, founded in 1744 by Dame Catherine Harpur Crewe. It was one of three schools to provide free education



for the children of the local people living in Ticknall and Calke on the estate of Calke Abbey.

Armed with this knowledge the parents got together and decided that they would go it alone, come what may. They invited Philip Toogood to plan and set up the new school on the basis of the ancient foundation. He and his wife, Annabel, became the first to teach in Dame Catherine's and it was agreed at the outset that the school must be non fee-paying and for children of all ages from 4 and a half onwards.

Significantly, the opportunity was to

be available for some children to attend the school on a part-time basis. This was to be 'flexi-schooling' where the parent was technically responsible for the education of the child with the school supporting the parent from the home base.

The history of the school has been turbulent and not without difficulty. That history and the current operation of the school are worthy of examination if we are to consider how much small schooling concept has to offer to the alternative education agenda in the 1990s.

## A Day With The Dame

DAME CATHERINE'S School nestles into one of the few back streets of Ticknall - a village set in the sort of hummocky, bosky farm landscape that is for ever the shire country that we are led to believe is typical of the home country. The village has six hundred and seventy souls; a gothic church and some ruins are adjacent to the school; there are a number of pubs and restaurants and one shop that doubles as newsagent and post office

The school comprises three classrooms, a cloakroom area, some space outside and the use of a field. Equipment is a combination of 'make do' and some good hardware that has been donated.

The school has several computers, a BBC, an aging, but workable, Amstrad and is proud possessor of an Acorn Archimedes. Some building and decoration work has been carried out by a combination of staff, students and parents; it is emphasised that this work has helped to create a bond between them.

The classrooms are areas that are used for infants, junior and secondary respectively. A similar age range and use of space to that described in Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* - except that the numbers are much smaller!

Two French students Hugo (about nine) and Alice (11/12) recorded their impressions from towards the end of a two week stay at the school.

**Lib ED:** What do you think about this school, Hugo?

**Hugo:** There's plenty of choice here.

**LE:** Just like at home in France?

**H:** Yes, but it's different. Here we all work together in a cooperative spirit, unlike in France. It is a very pleasant atmosphere.

**LE:** At home are you in a state or an alternative school?

**H:** Well I am Descholarisé, that is to say I am home educated.

**LE:** Do you prefer being Home Educated? What do you feel about it?

**H:** Well ... yes and no ...

**LE:** Why "No"?

**H:** Well, at home there's just me; whereas at school there are many and I

can have lots of mates.

**LE:** Alice, how do you find this school?

**Alice:** It's fine. I am able to get on with things and, yes I do find that I can share in what is going on in the lessons - the language is no real barrier as Philip speaks French.

Next Becky (12) gave some opinions about the school.

**LE:** How long have you been here?

From before it was an alternative school?

**B:** Yes, about nine years. I went to another local secondary school for about a week, but I didn't like it so I came back to this one. I like this school because it is small, I do not like big schools at all - with their long corridors and that ...

You get to know the adults a lot better and talk to them, whereas in a big school it is not the same.

**Dan:** Our parents know the school and give money to it, and know the teachers - so we all feel a lot more involved in the school. I've been here for four years. It's much, much better than the village school I went to before where the classes were about twenty five.

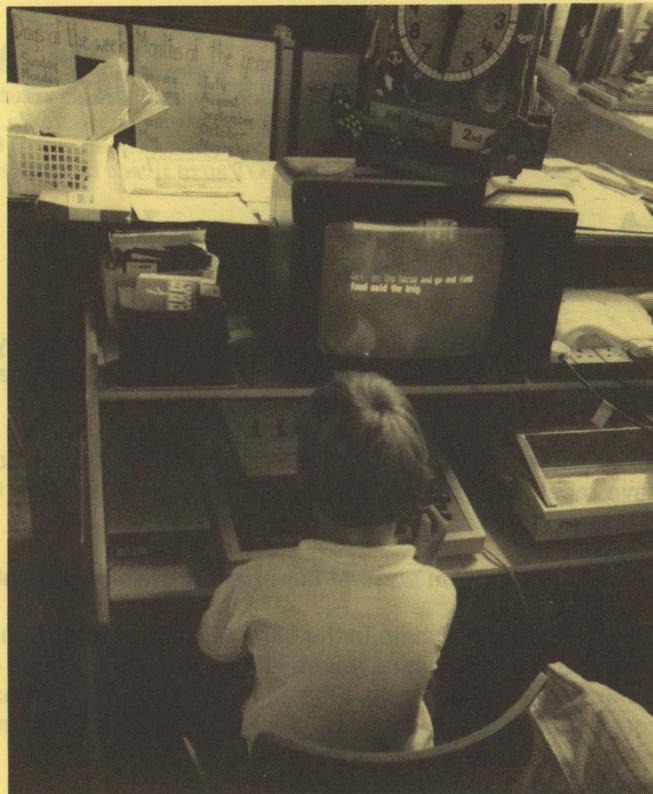
**LE:** Have you ideas about what you want to do after this place? How long do you want to stay?

**Students:** We want to do A-Levels here ... stay on to 18 or 19.

**LE:** Does it worry you at all that it is difficult to get access to the large equipment that you need for metalwork or science.

**Students:** Yes, but we'll fund raise for it: and sometimes people donate stuff! We use the computers quite a bit.

(At this point James, a student, handed *Lib ED* a brochure he had just worked out for setting up a recycling company.)



**LE:** What about games and things?

**J:** Well, we don't do the usual sort of games and sports: we go out to Leisure Centres and have fun. We are going swimming today as we usually do on Fridays.

**LE:** If there were to be any changes in the school what would you like to see happen?

**Student:** More people, but not too many!

**LE:** Have you seen many changes in the past: while you have been here?

**B:** Well, yes I have. When I first came here nine years ago it was very different. The teachers have changed too: they used to be much stricter, but nowadays they are much more friendly - in fact the whole place has become much more friendly.

**S:** We did have more art teaching, but the art teacher left - we used to go to Staunton Harold - Hey, do you know about the shop there - it's next door to the pottery.

**LE:** How did you come to choose this school?

**Parent:** Well, I live in the village and I had one little boy here before it closed down. I've been through both, like it used to be and now, and I am really pleased with the changes. I like the closeness of everything. My little boy is doing really well.

## In conversation with the Head and some of the staff

PHILIP TOOGOOD is the head at Dame Catherines. He has the air of someone who means business, behind the courteousness there is a feeling that he has ideas and will see them implemented.

He says that he respects what he terms a "technical Anarchist view of education" - but that we live in an imperfect world. However he does not offer a view of what he considers this technical anarchism to be. The idea emerges that mini-schooling is the important feature. He holds that you can "manage for order" in a mini-school and there does not necessarily have to be a change in teaching methods.

**Philip:** I find that as a result of my experiences of small schools, both at Hartland and here, my attitudes towards children has started to change. Not that I am any less strict with them. I find that the amount of exceedingly detailed preparation and input has reduced; but I do need to prepare the framework for working with small groups. Any rawness really shows up

with those numbers - but with a big class, you know you can just set them going - it's much less precise sort of thing.

**Daphne:** I think he's quite right: you see the thing I always question myself is - Could there be another way of doing what I am doing? - That's the difficulty because you are so inclined to do things, not in the same way, but in a similar way as before.

**Philip:** Jean finds this as well. She is an ex Maths Advisor who comes in regularly. She prepares very, very carefully. Every week she comes in bubbling over with excitement about what she has found out and about what is happening.

**Daphne:** I really admired what she did the other week. She had bits of card that really did not cost anything. She had this child who is not six until October, and she was getting him to make four sets of two. They did it practically. They did it with those and

they did it with blocks: and they started looking at patterns on a piece of paper. It was really good because he got it just like that - he was really on to multiplication ...

**Philip:** Well, he is a boy that many would type as being 'physical' and difficult before he came here.

**Lib ED:** What are the most important aspects of Dame Catherines?

**Philip:** Creativity in education is the place from which all else should spring. The trouble is that Educationists think that it is a question of taking models of education, describing it in little bits and strands, and then feeding it in to people, so that it is consumed just in the way that everything else is consumed, and then expecting something to happen.

In fact we are exactly the opposite. So therefore it is very important in Education to have SMALL, I mean a SMALL group basis, where the people involved are concerned with the development of a way of living and



articulation which constantly carries creativity, initiative, rationality with it.

**Lib ED:** So, what do you represent as the main achievement of Dame Catherines over the last ... how many years is it now?

**Philip:** Ha! Still to be in existence! No, what does seem to be appearing is a way of doing things with children day by day which seems to be encouraging the children to be resourceful, inventive ... quite self-propelled, able to work in small groups, consider each other in a sensitive way ... as a sort of way of life which it is good to be in. As a person.

The achievement has been endangered at some times by the enthusiasm of our protagonists. I think this is the danger and it is maybe where I part company with some of Libertarian Education's thinkers, in that I have always felt that as a progressive teacher, the danger is that

at the heart of many people who quite rightly, quite legitimately, adhere to a more anarchic view of society, Rousseillian view if you like, and there are many people who HOPE that it is like that.

Whereas in fact I would be with Thomas Hobbes: that life is "nasty, brutish and short" and that we need to be making structures that enable us to emerge from this. They are not, of course the structures that Thomas Hobbes would have recommended, of dictatorship and direction and so on. The freedom that the children have here is within very clear structural devices.

For example Sarah (teacher) is in here every day at eight o'clock working away, and I've been working here for two and half hours every night: freedom has to be guarded through structures - otherwise we have license, and one child's freedom becomes another child's misery.

I honestly feel that many people

come into this sort of thing because of their own personal problems. They try to work them out in the context of liberation education. That was the big danger. It led to having to take nasty decisions, trying to outface this one - and we did.

**Lib ED:** I've noticed that they observe that there was the old Dame Catherine's that was rather strict and horrible: whereas now they say the school is much more free and friendly.

**Philip:** Interestingly, when we had people who were rather more 'liberationists' the school got to be more old fashioned. The school now has less heat on personal relationships.

**Lib ED:** Where next then?

**Philip:** The next thing is that we are going in to Derby with the secondary project. We are making agreements with local business and industry. Each parent will try to raise money for the school and we will have the support of six businesses. There will be a tutor who will work with a management committee. The study for this is financed by Gulbenkian under the title of 'Flexi-College'. We hope to have clusters of this type of expanded small school in the inner city near to all these fantastic resources: which at present they are bussing kids away from to the security and safety of the suburbs.

**Lib ED:** Would this be applicable in the state system? I mean here you do not have to follow the National Curriculum, though there are some interesting things in it ...

**Philip:** We intend to do this new SEAC thing and, like in the US, you can take credits in it all the way through: and you can build up enough credits to get a GCSE, or whatever, if you want to. Really it is more suitable for tutor based learning: you need less specialist teachers, although we shall have a few.

We have a specialist science teacher here: she thinks that this is all very new and very interesting.

I shall work on the Derby Flexi-College for four days per week and come back here for Mondays.

Each group here will have a panel of four or five friendly people to back it up. This will include parents who will advise - it will not need me particularly, Sarah is very capable ...

The parents agreed that I would continue here for two more years while this thing is set up; but we will keep it all under review.

We hope to have a National Federation that will set up Flexi-Colleges all over the place, perhaps with a common charter of foundation that will lay down criteria as to what constitutes a Flexi-College.



## Reflecting on the day

TEACHING a one-off lesson in the school the *Lib ED* correspondent was drawn back in time to when he worked in a small town high school in a similar area. The students were polite and relaxed, raised hands to ask questions and were biddable. The accents were more County Derby than Derbyshire, the clothes conformist and practical.

With about 30 students and three teachers, including Philip Toogood, the Principal, it is a dream of a place to work in. As one teacher confided: "The money's terrible, but it's worth it."

Relationships between staff and students seem to be uniformly extremely friendly. All the students are on first name terms with staff.

Surprisingly the schools 'policy' on race and gender does not seem to extend very far. A teacher outlined her view that she could not understand the fuss

that was made about sexism and racism these days, and quoted the apocryphal story about the banning of *Baa, baa, Black Sheep* in favour of *Green Sheep* that, in fact was a canard originally made up by *Sun* journalists when they couldn't think of a story one day.

The attitude of "I treat them all the same" found so commonly amongst teachers who often have very highly developed skills as pleasant classroom managers, is not adequate to the realities faced by ethnic minorities and many women. Indeed the selection of stories which the children had been concentrating on caused a slight eyebrow twitch: *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Rapunzel*.

Even infants are capable of getting the message about the roles of men and women as characters, and while there is some good drama work emerging from

*Rapunzel* it seems that some sort of sexism awareness training would not come amiss.

Educationally I could see little difference between the Dame and many of the small schools that still exist in the state system.

The children are basically in age related classes and whatever title one chooses Philip Toogood comes across as being the Head.

The timetable, as displayed on the blackboard, is similar to many others with regular activities broken up by 'events'. The school generally does English at certain times, and there is a tight timetable for exam work.

However, the children do feel that they are in a position to make some choices at certain times and sometimes to control their own activities. Above all; they like the place.

## Flexischooling at Ticknall

Janet & Roland Meighan are two interested educationalists with regular contacts with Dame Catherine's School, mainly because of membership of *Education Now* which is based at the school. Here they assess the impact of flexischooling on Dame Catherine's.

EDUCATION is certainly happening at Ticknall - education, not mere study, or mere training, or mere National Curriculumism. The school tries to work to the open network of ideas known as flexischooling. But flexischooling is a demanding concept. Ultimately, it implies flexibility in all the dimensions of education. How is Dame Catherine's shaping up?

The flexibility of its government is clear: the school started as a parent-teacher co-operative and this remains its distinctive feature. Indeed, given the usual pattern in most school of authoritarian, often autocratic, governing bodies with their pseudo democratic trappings, it is surprising how taken-for-granted it is in Ticknall that all the parents have an equal stake in running the educational programme and maintaining and financing the school. The radical nature of this fact seems to be almost unrecognised, or at least overlooked, in the locality.

The parent-teacher co-operative has not operated in a values vacuum. At

the outset, the headteacher declared his general educational philosophy and the sticking points that this implied. Although the enterprise was to be a collective journey of discovery, the 'captain' only agreed to steer the vessel in certain directions. Thus, imposing uniforms on learners to satisfy the hang-ups of adults was not on the agenda. Neither was fee-paying. The school agreed to take responsibility for raising finance as a co-operative activity.

Furthermore, the school would not stay a parochial venture but would co-operate with a research, conference and publishing activity, *Education Now*, with national and international perspectives. There have already been lots of benefits. These include contacts with Poland with a Polish teacher having already spend a spell teaching in the school, and regular exchange visits with a school in France. USA teachers from Denver have spent time in the school. The school hosted a conference on Personalised Education which was highly successful. Another is being

planned in conjunction with the National association of Student-Centred Learning.

The school agreed with the headteacher, rather trustingly, that the open network of ideas known as flexischooling would be its map for exploration. The school tried a bold venture - flexibility of locations for regular learning which is rather understated in its significance by the term 'part-time schooling'.

Working with parents who chose to educate partly at home and partly at school took place for over two years with some difficult lessons gradually being learnt by the families and by the school. It was suspended rather in haste in a moment of staffing difficulties.

In retrospect, we conclude that one lesson to be learned for the next time the school ventures in this direction is that actual contracts between the school and the home-based educators cannot be left informal and need to be taken seriously enough to be both carefully negotiated and written down and any revisions treated with equal seriousness.

In Charles Handy's study of the management of schools in England inevitably organised using the authoritarian pyramid model, the bottom layer of the actual learners was so overlooked that they did count in statements of the size of schools. These were declared in terms of numbers of staff.

At Ticknall the learners matter. They are involved in dialogue about their experience at the school in all sorts of ways. Thus when an evening seminar was organised on the teaching of reading, parents, teachers and older pupils all turned up and worked together: after all the senior pupils are helping the younger ones with their reading in the school from time to time so it just seemed the obvious thing to do.

A more systematic approach to sharing power with pupils, however, by involving them democratically in any appropriate decision-making and decision-making bodies, is under way.

This initially began with the pupils participation in planning the thematic basis for aspects of the curriculum. Ideas for investigations were suggested and discussed by all the children and staff. Co-operative, democratic decision making led to appropriate selection of



ideas and relevant modes of working with built-in opportunities for class groups to review the process of implementation and achievements.

Learning democracy and democratic learning are in evidence at the start of each day when the middle and upper age groups begin with a group review of the previous days activity and plan details of the programme for the current day. (In contrast, in mainstream education even the tokenism of allowing pupil governors was made illegal.)

It is easy to make the assumption that it is less difficult for teachers to work as a democratic team in small schools. But differing philosophies, expectations and personalities can be exposed in a small arena and create hurdles to be cleared.

Like most schools Dame Catherine's has had some experience of this, but with the present staffing of full-time and part-time teachers, effective teamwork has developed throughout the school.

One positive contribution to this process was an IT-INSET initiative involving students teachers and a tutor from a local College of Higher Education. The approach to curriculum development employed stressed the value of co-operative whole team

planning, 'doing' and reviewing as an on-going cyclical process.

This idea was then adopted by the Early Years group of teachers and was followed by a whole school approach. The benefits of a co-operative, democratic approach to decision making are already evident in the responses of the teachers who are valuing the support, stimulation and personal satisfaction gained by working in this way.

The opportunities presented to analyse, evaluate and plan as a group highlight its potential for developing the quality of education for the children. Needless to say, parents are not excluded from this process; regular meetings enable them to be both 'informed' and to share their ideas with others.

The school has not been without its periods of conflict. Wounds have been sustained but the strength of the parent-teacher co-operative organisation has survived the tests so far.

Wounds have healed, but some teachers are now former teachers and a few families have made other arrangements for their children's education, either by their own choice or at the request of the majority of the

parent-teacher co-operative. The pupils in the school have tended to just get on with enjoying their learning and their school, leaving the adults to sort out these ideological, financial or administrative conflicts.

All this constitutes education and re-education for many parents who have learned the sometimes difficult and demanding skills of co-operation and participation. They have grown in experience and confidence and have learned to take constant review of the school's programme in their stride in place of any easy complacency and passing of the buck to the teachers.

The flexibility of the school curriculum is now quite dazzling as the programme moves more or less effortlessly through set routines like the National Curriculum studies, and then the Independent Study parts of the day, the Pupil-pupil tutoring, phases of group work, formal instructional phases, and whole school projects. The latest whole school project was the establishment of a sculpture trail using natural materials in the grounds of Calke Abbey.

So, as regards operating flexischooling, how is Dame Catherine's shaping up? Our verdict is that very good progress is being made.



## 'Differing philosophies, expectations and personalities'

THE PICTURE we have then is of a new school steering a difficult but progressive course in the most trying of circumstances. The experience for the children at Dame Catherine's now is quite clearly a positive one but the school has seen children, parents and teachers depart because they felt that the school did not break enough radical ground for them.

There has been sustained conflict, the details of which do not warrant coverage here. What is important though is to look at some of the issues that underlay the conflict for they reveal a lot about the prospects for libertarian education in the small English 'shire' village setting.

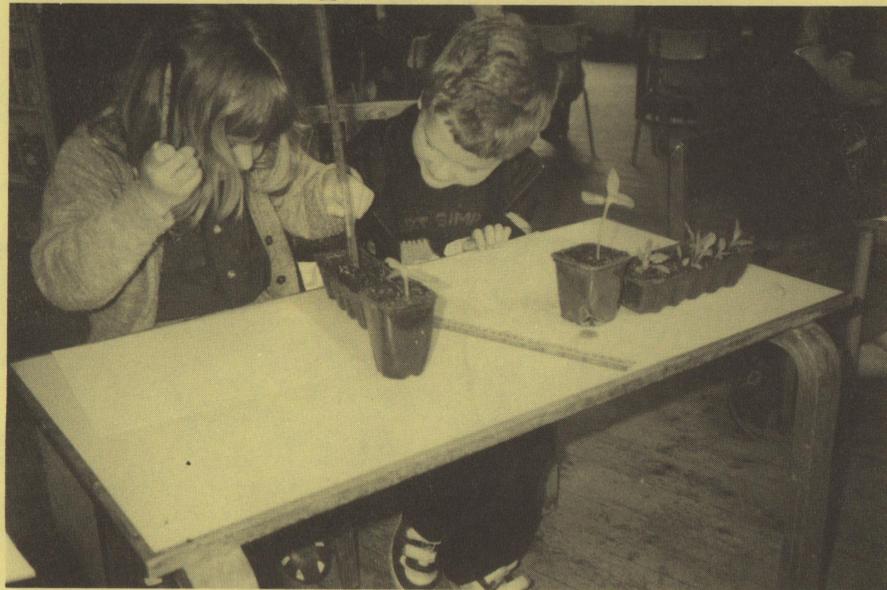
When Dame Catherine's re-opened as a small school it attracted a number of children, parents and teachers who were sympathetic to libertarian ideas. Many wanted to use the school as a 'flexi-school', where they could attend/teach/support on a part-time basis. They were attracted by the possibility of free learning.

Jessie Hill, a pupil until earlier this year, wrote of her first feelings about the school, "I liked Dame Catherine's because it didn't have a school uniform and all the teachers were nice and you could do what you wanted. There weren't many rules."

She left because rules were introduced, in her view by the head, "I left because I didn't want to go any more because of the rules introduced - like we had to sit with the other people when we had our dinners, we weren't allowed to sit alone with a friend. Also we had to have one place where we always sat all the time and we couldn't choose who we sat next to and I was put on reading scheme book 9 and lots of people were on book 11 and they all teased me and laughed at me and I didn't like the reading scheme anyway, it was boring."

Jessie felt that as the school developed it lost a certain amount of flexibility. Alison Greenwood, one of a number of teachers who felt they had to leave as the prospects for libertarian education narrowed bears this out;

"I can't help feeling that a dichotomy exists regarding the purpose of Dame Catherine's and its aims - ordinary village school versus alternative educational establishment. I have watched two factions vying for position at the expense of each other and the



pupils they purported to serve. Prejudice and insularity made it impossible for there to be a balance of both philosophies. Issues were invariably perceived as a battle of wills between so-called 'alternative trendy educationalists' and the more traditional approach."

What is clear is that a majority of the children and parents from Ticknall village itself were wary and uninformed about libertarian ideas. They sought a local, small, humane school and they have worked to develop it. Some children who attended the school to begin with felt the 'weight' of the local village community.

Bonnie wrote to *Lib Ed*;

"At school there was a notice board in the middle of the main room to put information and stuff on. When I was about seven I became a vegetarian and at nine I joined the vegetarian society. When I first joined I got lots of leaflets and stickers. One particular leaflet was about battery farming and the cruelty of it. I stuck a few copies of it on the notice board. Not many people took any but it was my contribution to the vegetarian society."

Some of the parents at the school who are really into meat and just happen to be butchers protested. They thought it was telling people to become vegetarians or something. Then Alison explained that I had to take them down. I think this is horrible because I was only giving people information about it and not really trying to turn other people into vegetarians. I am a vegetarian who does not really try to turn other people into vegetarians I just think that people should be told how cruelly animals are being treated by

some people."

The picture that emerges then is that it was difficult for a libertarian education to operate at Dame Catherine's probably because it was not desired by a majority of Ticknall parents.

Pat Hill, a parent of children in the school in its early days and a part-time teacher too, felt very strongly that the committee running the school did not want outsiders and libertarians in the school.

"I feel that the committee was virtually hijacked by a group of prejudiced, right wing insular parents."

Of course the local parents have every right to decide the type of school they choose to fund and run. But the aims, philosophies and objectives of such a school should be clearly and publicly stated.

I didn't like the attitude of the school to flexi-timers. It was evident from the start that no real provision had been put in place for part-time pupils. Although the school was being promoted as one where attendance was negotiable and flexible, it became apparent to me that this was a constant irritant.

We were apparently marked down as people to watch, 'alternative types' with whom the school did not want to be associated."

Libertarian education was too much and too soon for Dame Catherine's as it re-opened.

As a small school which services a small village embracing ideas of co-operation and a spirit of community it is clearly progressing and developing. What is significant though is that to survive it has not been able to embrace libertarian perspectives and personnel.

## A NIGHTMARE ON EVERYBODY'S STREET

What does war do to children? Many thousands are killed or maimed directly in hostilities every year. As a result of the recent Gulf War alone nearly two hundred thousand children will have died. Millions more will learn that the mindless killing of strangers is part of our way of life. In the next few pages we try to form an understanding of this horrific problem, and to offer some ideas on how to break the vicious circle of violence breeding violence.



## Standing in the light, fighting with shadows

Matthew Appleton, a houseparent at Summerhill, questions the process that regularly brings humanity to the brink of colossal catastrophe.

AS THE YEAR began fighting broke out in the Gulf. Yet again humanity unleashed its murderous impulses on the international scene. Now the crisis seems to have passed, but it WILL reappear again in some form or other, in some conflict, in some country in the future. The location and the circumstances are not of any great importance. THE CRISIS WILL REAPPEAR. It will reappear again and again, until ensuing disaster is so great that humanity will be forced to either face itself fully, or there will be nothing left to face. This is not idle speculation, it is inevitable unless we begin, now, to question the process that continues to take us to the brink of this colossal catastrophe.

The question is not a political one, nor religious. There is only one question of any fundamental importance that must be asked, and asked with all sincerity. The question is this: How is it that we turn our children into life-haters? Unless we ask this question of ourselves and begin to tackle the process by which we change our children from creatures of creation into instruments of destruction, then we are evading the central issue of the present evolution.

If we are content to settle for the answer that it is something inherent in the human animal that maims, murders, tortures and rapes it's fellow

beings, then, given the knowledge and technology that we now possess, we must also content ourselves with the understanding that extinction is inevitable. Unless, of course, something miraculous is to occur.

Yet, everyday, the miraculous does take place right under our very noses, though we barely comprehend it, and rarely welcome it as it deserves to be welcomed. I am not talking now of mystical miracles about to fall out of the skies, but of the miracle of life as it takes shape and emerges from the convulsions of sex and birth.

If we are to acknowledge something miraculous here, (and this is something that must be acknowledged, felt, not simply calculated by sociologists and psychiatrists) then we are also acknowledging a certain inherent 'goodness', a 'rightness' rooted in life, rather than against it. There is certainly nothing miraculous in the way we conduct our affairs as adults, particularly in the realms of politics and international relationships.

What is it then about the way we greet this emerging of life and thwart it's unfolding that reduces this miracle to a bundle of anxieties and conflicts. Certainly a large part of this process belongs to the province of education. It is obvious that the answer to our problems is not a academic one, and yet academic astuteness is forever being

held up as the measure of a good education.

What good did their education do for those young men who died in the desert; Iraqis, Americans and British alike. How many more generations must endure this hell before we question the value of the educations we offer to our children?

If we are ever to move beyond this arena we must educate children to make contact with life, not deaden them to it with superficial morality and compulsive teaching. This can only come about by the child feeling the depths of life in his or her own being, feeling it's currents and expressive urges.

This cannot be taught in the classroom. It can only come about through an understanding of and respect for the emotional life of the child, and we can only grope towards such an understanding by allowing the child the freedom to express his or her emotions. Every time a baby is born life reinstates it's right to live fully again.

Until we amend our child-rearing and educational processes so that they embrace and protect that right, we will always find ourselves in conflict. Our conflicts will not serve to save us from any mythical, inherent, natural flaw, they will compulsively carry us again and again into the cess pits of hatred and warfare.

# Play for Life

Play for Life was founded early in the 1980s in response to the concern about the growing 'corruption' of real play by the flood of violent games and 'war toys' reaching children and about the effect this would have on children as they grew up. Ian C Caldwell of Play for Life explains.

TELEVISION has, of course, been a great influence here; through the violence and aggression on the screen, and through the use of the medium by the toy industry to sell their products - many of which will have a far from beneficial effect on children.

Play for Life began by researching the toy market, seeking products which would be life-affirming - that is would convey the idea of love and respect for life rather than hatred and contempt for life (concepts which are normally alien to children) and consulting with interested manufactures (and there are many).

Guides to playthings (not just toys) were produced and distributed, and they were warmly received by parents, educators, carers, social workers and a variety of organisations.

These guides are helping to educate the buying public of what features to look for in play materials and to create a demand which is gradually getting through to the manufacturers (or to some, at least).

More recently, Play for Life's efforts have been aimed at finding and publicising books which support and promote life-affirming play of all kinds for all children, and we are now

supplying these, as well as selected playthings, by mail order.

The recent Gulf War, which cannot be considered to be 'over' by any means, has been unique and may well set the pattern for future conflicts, in that it was undoubtedly the most televised conflict yet: it was given massive coverage in the UK, and apparently even greater coverage in the USA through the number of news channels available in that country.

The long term effects of such continual display of violence - real, not imaginary - on children may not be known for years to come.

Some toy manufacturers have not been slow to respond to the 'opportunities' afforded by the Gulf War.

Hardly had the shooting stopped when children were able to buy up-to-date 'toys and games': 22-inch patriot missiles with a range of 600 feet; board games - Gulf War, Line of Sand, Butcher of Baghdad and Gulf Strike; arcade games such as F-15 Strike Eagle, in which you take off from an aircraft carrier, strafe oil refineries, desert fortifications and oil rigs and, if all goes 'well', collect a Congressional Medal of Honour.

Some effects of the Gulf War and its

prominence in the media are already known; there have been reports of children having nightmares and attacks of hysteria from what they have seen.

These effects may be short-lived - but they may well leave scars on the minds of these children that will have much longer-lasting effects.

Possibly more worrying are the unseen effects on the many more children who have not (yet?) shown any overt signs of having been affected by the war and its mass coverage. How many children have unseen scars that may change their outlook on life?

How many children have come to accept violence and war as a 'natural' part of life, and how will this affect their behaviour and attitudes in future years?

Now, more than ever in recent memory, may be the time to encourage in children the qualities that are really life-affirming: positive images of life, constructive attitudes, empathy, tolerance, open-mindedness, respect for nature in the broadest possible sense, fairness and justice, the ability to others points of view - in short, a love for all life and a zest for living.

Who knows? Perhaps, in time, events like the Gulf War may be a thing of the past. One can only hope ...



Play for life? (Photo: Lib ED)

# War play can damage your healthy development

Can war games damage children's healthy development? Yes they can, argue the Peace Pledge Union in their pamphlet *The Politics of War Play*. Here is an extract.

CHILDREN'S first understanding of the concept of world peace and international relations will be influenced by early experiences in resolving conflicts and establishing reciprocity with others, rather than from awareness of real conflicts among nations.

Concepts about friends and enemies at a global level will grow out of such things as children's social experiences with peers, their exposure to similarities and differences among people, and how these are treated by adults around them.

Thus, a child's early concept of 'enemy' - which is based in part on experiences of co-operation and conflict with other children - may come to include specific labels, for example Russians, Germans, as the labels are heard in adult conversation and broadcasting.

War play has the potential for exerting an especially powerful influence on the political ideas children construct. Its very nature and content are permeated with issues of power and conflict, right and wrong, good and evil, friends and enemies - all basic components of political concepts.

As children learn understanding through play they bring new meaning back to the outside world. Because fantasy and reality can be meshed in the young child's mind, the political concepts constructed in fantasy war play have the potential for influencing how real world experience is interpreted.

Much of the content of war play is influenced by social agents - the family, the school, mass media and peer groups.

Toys can be seen as a reflection of society's dominant social and political values. In Sweden, for example, war toys are banned. Such a ban can be viewed as reflecting a non-militaristic posture and policymakers' efforts to socialise children into such a political philosophy.

It may not be a coincidence that rapid increase in the sale of war toys in Britain in recent years is in some ways connected with similar increase in military spending by the government. We may well ask what it means when a society seems to be channelling its boys so extensively into war play?

As children spend more and more

time watching television, this is becoming an increasingly important source for the content of their play. It is a source rich in political significance.

Disagreements are usually terminated by violence, and dialogue does not acknowledge the duality of human nature.

The bad guys are usually foreign-sounding or faceless and women are generally portrayed in subservient roles.

Much of this can teach children to behave in dehumanised, aggressive and war-like ways and to value physical strength, power and violence.

When the quality of play is distorted in these ways and children are exposed to increasing amounts of militarism and violence, the concepts they form mirror what they have seen and are more likely to be militaristic.

The aggressiveness that they exhibit may thus be more a reflection of what they are imitating than an indication of their own need to work out feelings or experience a sense of power.

War play may foster children's development through a complex and



active process in which children use the content of play to come to grips with the world around them. However, when children's play is characterised by conventionality, lack of variety, meagre content and endless repetition, optimal development may be impeded.

Today children use television-based toys to imitate television images and behaviour with little variation, elaboration or evidence that they are making inner meanings of their own. It is increasingly clear that developmental needs are not being met through war play.

## Resources

### Play for Life

31b Ipswich Road, Norwich NR2 2LN

*Play for Life* is a national voluntary organisation and a registered charity with links overseas. It publishes a quarterly magazine as well as resource material, holds conferences, workshops and exhibitions and runs a membership scheme. Send a stamped addressed envelope for further information.

### Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT)

11 Goodwin Street, London N5 3HQ. tel:071 281 0297

School resources available from CAAT include a classroom pack ideal for GCSE courses and General Studies discussion groups, eight specially designed colour posters, a paperback book, *Death on delivery*, and two videos.

CAAT's charity the *Trust for Research and Education on the Arms Trade* is at the same address.

### Peace Pledge Union

Dick Sheppard House, 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DX. tel:071 387 5501

The PPU publish a huge range of material and its *Children and War Project* is particularly well focussed. White Poppies are available from the PPU every year.

# Poppy days are here again

Although they've been around for nearly sixty years, White Poppies are hardly visible at all in our schools. Here the Peace Pledge Union, from whom White Poppies are available, show how they can be introduced in schools alongside the much more common Red Poppies of the British Legion.

EDUCATION in citizenship includes learning about charities, and every year one such charity, the British Legion, approaches many schools to give pupils the chance to donate money for red poppies. The red poppy is a symbol "lest we forget" of all those who "died for Queen and Country", and donations provide facilities for the armed forces who were injured in the war.

However, some people feel uneasy that there is no hint of reconciliation and healing of international differences in the arrangement whereby red poppy donations go to survivors among 'our troops', and not to those injured on the other side by our men, or the innocent civilians on both sides who suffered through no fault of their own.

## Us and them

This difficulty is only partially answered by saying that charity can be spread so thin that our own people would suffer. Isn't an "us and them" approach a major cause of conflict which can escalate to war?

A more serious cause for unease is the lack of commitment to seeking alternatives to war as a means of solving problems. Consider the context in which the red poppy is worn. The ceremony of laying the red poppy at the war memorials is often accompanied by military parades, with their reminder that wars could happen again.

"Could happen" too easily shifts to "should happen" when serious conflicts arise, especially if well-equipped military forces are ready in the wings, and governments, without working hard enough at non-military solutions, are tempted to use those military forces. The danger is that large military - industrial complexes can make wars more likely, rather than less.

If Remembrance ceremonies were confined to civilian dress, and "lest we forget" was matched by an unequivocal "never again", many people would be happier with the red poppy.

## The White Poppy

Those who feel the need to express their sorrow on Remembrance Sunday by expressing a commitment to working for the changes needed to make war a thing of the past, are increasingly choosing to wear a white poppy.

White poppies were first introduced in the 1930s by the Co-operative

Women's Guild. Since the mid-eighties, the Peace Pledge Union has sold increasing numbers of white poppies for those who wish to buy them. White poppy wreaths are laid at many local war memorials, alongside red poppy wreaths, and the annual parade to the Cenotaph in London includes an afternoon procession of members of the Peace Pledge Union and their sympathisers bearing a wreath of white poppies.

What about poppies in schools? Very few schools as yet offer white poppies alongside red poppies. More traditional schools regard tradition as sufficient justification for only offering the red poppy. However, times change, and even the best traditions are modified if people see the need for doing so.

Would the British Legion's revenue suffer if white poppies were offered too? There is little likelihood of this, as white poppies are purchased by only a small minority at present, and publicity for the white poppies has actually helped red poppies as well.

There is nothing to stop those who buy white poppies also donating money to the British Legion. Some people wear both red and white. People have a right to choose their charity.

## The educational issue

Education, in contrast to indoctrination, offers choices and encourages children to think before they choose. Pupils need to learn to make up their own minds about issues. If only red poppies are offered in schools, then choice is not given.

By offering pupils a choice of the white poppy alongside the red poppy, pupils would have the chance to buy both red and white, or one, or none. In choosing, provided the choice is accompanied by adequate information and the chance to discuss and reflect, children are introduced to serious educational issues, and are more likely to give them the thought that they deserve.

Thorough preparation is essential before doing anything new, especially when strong emotions may be involved. Clear consultation at all levels defuses suspicion and increases trust. Here is how one primary school headmistress, who offered both red and white poppies, first prepared the ground with staff, governors and parents, and then

introduced aspects of the issues to pupils.

Firstly, the white poppies were offered in context of a school policy, agreed by the staff, which rejected fighting as a way of trying to solve conflict in school, but encouraged children to defend themselves out of school "by running away, shouting or trying to stick up for themselves".

## Consultation

Secondly, the member of staff responsible for charity collections was consulted. The problem was raised that red poppies are mass-produced cheaply and they can be acquired without any money being sent, whereas professionally-manufactured white poppies are not cheap, and the Peace Pledge Union cannot normally afford to offer them to those schools which do not buy the poppies in advance.

It was agreed that this primary school would buy a box of white poppies. All donations from the children would go to the relevant charity chosen.

Thirdly, well in advance of the week before Remembrance Sunday, the matter was cleared with school governors.

Fourthly, the parents were informed what was going to happen, and why, with a suitable letter (see below). Parents do not necessarily agree with everything that a school does; inviting parents to share the views on school matters makes them feel that at least the school respects their right to differ.

People are often at their most aggressive when they feel strongly and yet feel that their opinions are ignored or discounted.

Fifthly, the white poppies were offered in the context of school assembly, where the moral stance of "some people" that "fighting is never right" was "balanced" by the view of others, that fighting is "sometimes necessary".

Sixthly, the white poppies were offered alongside red poppies, so that pupils could choose to buy either one or both. A range of choices, and a chance to explore the reasons for them, are a part of learning for living.

This was the letter sent out by the headmistress:

Dear Parents,  
This year we will again be selling

November 9th



poppies in school on Thursday and Friday this week. The children will hear about this in assembly and in their classes.

Red poppies will be sold to raise money for the British Legion, for disabled servicemen and their families. White poppies, provided by the Peace Pledge Union, will be sold and money raised will go - at their request - to the United Nations Refugee Fund, to help families and children forced to leave their homes because of conflict in their own countries.

Each of these are very worthy causes and if you wish to support either of them, your child may bring in a small donation (10p to 25p) and buy a poppy.

In the assembly I will be talking about fighting and different attitudes to it: why some people believe that it is necessary and why others believe that it is never right. It is not easy to explain these complex ideas briefly, and perhaps you would like to talk to your own child about how you feel?

Fighting is not allowed in school, because we feel that children should learn other ways of solving conflict, and in the last resort there is always an adult available who can help them sort out their problems. However, we also want to encourage children to defend themselves if they are out alone, by running away, shouting or trying to stick up for themselves.

I am sure that you also encourage your children to look after themselves sensibly if you are not there to keep

them safe.

I would welcome your help in talking this through at home.

Yours sincerely,

(Headmistress)

## School Assembly

This is how the headmistress handled the school assembly.

Twelve children in six pairs acted out the poem *The Challenge* taken from *Please Mr Butler* by Allan Ahlberg. The 'B's had been carefully rehearsed to stand their ground with the 'A's, fearlessly but unaggressively. Their tone was firmly assertive, humorous and friendly. In the last exchange, 'B' laughingly made an exit, giving a cheerful, friendly wave.

## The Challenge by Allan Ahlberg

A: My dad can fight your dad.  
B: You must be mad!  
A: My mum can fight your mum.  
B: No chance, chum.  
A: My brother can fight your brother.  
B: Pull the other!  
A: My gran can fight your gran.  
B: You're joking man!  
A: My cat can fight your cat.  
B: Don't bet on that.  
A: And I can fight you!  
B: Toodle.....oo!

The value of this presentation was that it offered the children a chance to see the language and attitudes which 'B' used when faced with 'A's confrontation. It showed them how to de-escalate conflict with dignity and good humour.

The head then invited discussion from the assembled children and, after taking a range of comments, asked two children who had been fighting in the playground to come forward and show where they had been hurt as a result.

They were asked if it had been worth it. They were ambivalent about it. The head accepted this, but pointed out to the others the medical treatment that had been required at the time. Lastly, the head talked about red and white poppies, announced that they would be available, and encouraged children to support whichever charity or charities they wished.

## Over To You

Would you like to offer children the chance to consider the issues raised by white poppies in your school? We urge you to start the ball rolling early for the necessary consultation and permission.

Do not be surprised if there is opposition, especially from those who have lost loved ones in the armed forces. But while acknowledging grief sympathetically, we can gently put the case for white poppies as symbols of hope for the better future that everybody wants.

# The Milky Bars aren't on us

Jan Melichar, of the Children and War Project which aims to expose and challenge the influences on the young which make war acceptable, says that the view that complex problems can be solved by brute force is a travesty.

DURING JULY, in regional contests around Britain, some 400 to 500 children were auditioning for the part of the next Milky Bar Kid.

The Milky Bar Kid, in the past and no doubt to be in the future, is the lad with the charming and mischievous look who, in imitation of Hollywood's fantasy of the Wild West's glorious, glamorous and gunslinging past, Nestle hope will help sell tons of tooth decaying chocolate.

While these contests were being held teams of visiting physicians in Iraq were reporting on the widespread malnutrition especially among the very young many of whom were dying. Some 170,000 children under the age of five are expected to die in the coming year from the delayed effect of the Gulf war.

To put the above two observations side by side may seem an odd conjunction but as is the way with conjunctions their oddity or appropriateness depends on ones point

of view.

'Points of view' these days are helpfully marked on many tourist maps; there are even little blue rays indicating the direction in which to look in case there should be any doubt when faced with a bewildering choice of a 360 degree panorama.

Our mental maps - those systems of belief and value - are similarly marked, but the blue rays indicating where and what to look at are the product of a less precise and more capricious mapmaker.

As on holidays, so in everyday life we locate 'significant subjects' with the help of 'arrows', scored into our cerebral cortex in our early years. These together with ideological templates picked up at our parents knees, tried and tested in the games we played, refined by the things we read and watched, give shape and meaning to a confusing and otherwise incoherent world.

Thus focused and blinkered we find it hard to see that the world need not be

as it is - that 170,000 children need not be killed for any reason. Harder still is to feel that we can do something to prevent such slaughter; hardest of all is to believe and feel that the suffering of fellow human beings is not something we ought to let pass with mere regret and perhaps a donation to a good cause.

As the bombs rained on Iraq the sales of toy military planes and missiles soared and as the 'surgical' strikes drew blood in the sands of Iraq, our television screens became curiously bloodless.

As many of us were liberating ourselves from the stifling social straightjackets in the 60s, in Iraq the foundations of a repressive and genocidal regime were being laid and, until August 1990, enthusiastically supported by East and West.

We know in general that the way we see the world is influenced by our personal history and particularly by the events in our early lives and their social context but we continue to be strangely

selective about what we accept as influential.

Sexism and racism are, by a growing number of thinking people, recognised as by and large social constructs which, in a variety of ways, cause a great deal of hurt and harm. Many also believed that this neither need nor should be so and a variety of strategies are employed to change our understanding and particularly that of children.

Many, for example, complained that the Milky Bar Kid competitions excluded non-white children, yet none complained that it excluded girls nor that it glamorised and exploited violence which, it seem, is natural.

Over 170,000 children under five will die as a result of the war in the Gulf; this is in addition to the hundreds of thousands of children, women and men who have already died in this, single, widely supported conflict.

Poor King Herod, so vilified for sending his soldiers to kill innocent infants so that one would not grow up to take his throne, while modern men, some barely old enough to vote, with bloodless effort rain death on map co-ordinates and receive medals for which 170,000 children will pay with their lives.

Unlike Herod soldiers who come home with blood on their swords, 'our brave lads' return with clean hands to a heroes welcomed and some may run for President. And the sales of war toys rise.

Can anyone identify a good enough reason why 170,000 children should be killed? Surely a reasonable question to which a resounding silence is the only answer. Yet the war in the Gulf was a well supported war.

Many millions of men and women in Britain as in the United States, said 'Go' and thus supported this slaughter of the innocent in a country most of them could not locate on a map. Is anyone responsible for this?

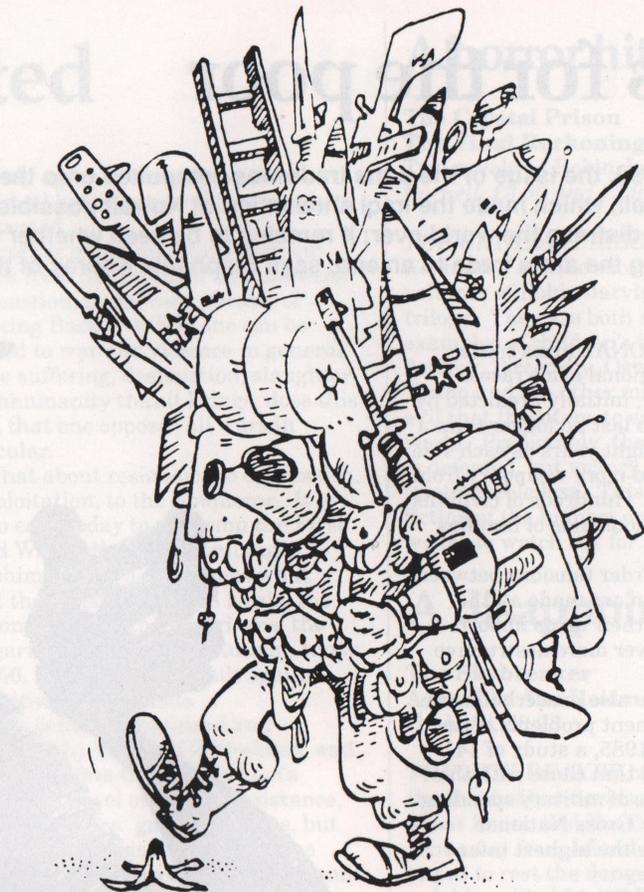
Should Saddam, Bush, Thatcher or Major be hauled in front of a war crimes tribunal? Take your choice, it depends on your point of view.

But what about the millions who supported the war? What about the hundreds of thousands ordinary kindly people who love their children and care about their future?

They in air conditioned, union protected, landscaped Business Parks, made and assembled the bombs and missiles that smashed Iraq's infrastructure on which life, especially the lives of the young and vulnerable depend.

No blood stained butchers or torturers here, just kindly, ordinary folk who clock off at 5.00 and, as gifts of love, buy their sons imitations of weapons that kill children like them in far away countries.

What did you do in the Gulf War daddy? would have been wasted propaganda when parents around the



country breathed a sigh of relief as business in the declining weapons industry picked up and enabled them to enthusiastically do their bit as it helped to pay for the Milky Bars.

We can only speculate what answer people would have given if asked, before the coalition forces were sent the desert. "Are you prepared to accept the responsibility for the killing of 170,000 children so that the ruler of Kuwait can be restored to his throne?"

Straight forward questions about the responsibility for death through war are thin on the ground. Even talking about the issues feels slightly odd. There is a sense of unreality about it all.

How can one judge how many people's lives are worth a possible outcome? Indeed can one make such a judgement? Our childhood and education has left us staggeringly inexperienced in such judgements; nor, as a society we have not progressed much beyond the 'Bang bang you're dead' approach to problems solving.

It's not surprising. Since the very nature and content of war games are permeated with issues of power and conflict, right and wrong, good and evil, friends and enemies - all basic components of political concepts - we can see that we are brought up to a thoroughly simplistic immoral and destructive view of life.

The childhood world of fantasy easily and imperceptibly becomes meshed with adult 'reality' to form the

template for a narrow vision in which you shoot first and wring your hands afterwards.

In this simple world where the good guys wear white hats and the bad ones black hats problems of responsibility let alone the need to question or consider the fate of 170,000 children do not arise.

With a gun in your hand, whether your name is Billy or Milky Bar, compassion and humanity even if you have heard of it goes down the pan.

Just as the Milky Bar Kid is a travesty of what was a brutal selfish and mindless reality, so too is the view that complex problems can be solved by brute force.

It is easy when raging against the futile destruction of war to create an alternative 'template' to promote a different reality or fantasy, rather than argue a 'rational' case and why not?

If there is a rational case for killing 170,000 children then we need a new language. There is no 'proof' that war play will make one do anything in particular anymore than would (should it exist) a toy 'Rapist Kit' turn us all into rapists.

We don't have Rapist Kits for a variety of reasons but among them is the view that rape is a painful, brutal and therefore undesirable act and not appropriate for children to imitate. In short a rapist is not a desirable role model.

Is the mindless killing of strangers not too an undesirable social model?



# Arms for the poor

At the end of 1990, the issue of the arms trade was catapulted onto the international agenda. It was imported weaponry after all, which made the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait possible. But arms imports are the fuel of many wars and much distress the world over; it remains to be seen whether the recent cacophony of calls for arms control will bring the arms trade to an end, says Stephanie Koorey of the Trust for Research and Education on the Arms Trade.

THE CONVENTIONAL arms trade fuels wars and regional arms races. The Iran/Iraq war, initially predicted by military experts to last no longer than a fortnight, lasted eight years as each side imported more and more weaponry from around the world. Hundreds of civilians were killed, and thousands of families displaced.

The chronic border tensions between India and Pakistan are made all the more worrying as their arms imports accumulate into ever more destructive arsenals.

The arms trade also exacerbates the debt and development problems of the Third World. In 1985, a study of 141 countries revealed that those with the highest percentage of military spending in relation to their Gross National Products also have the highest infant mortality rates.

Although Third World military imports have actually decreased in recent years, the effects of the arms trade on development will continue to debilitate the economies and lives of millions of people without a shot being fired.

For repressive regimes, new armoury and the training of their soldiers raises their international stature as well as intimidating their civilian populace.

It gives the signal that "everything is OK in that country" as MP George Foulkes noted regarding the training of a Salvadorean soldier. (Hansard, 15/12/86) Those children who survive the effects of the arms trade across the Third World, grow up in a climate of militarism, arms-induced poverty and fear.

While assessment of the human devastation in the Iraq region continues, Indonesia is but one country proceeding to build its armoury with vast amounts of weaponry from abroad - a significant amount from Britain.

Parallels have been drawn between President Saddam Hussein and President Suharto of Indonesia. Indonesia annexed East Timor, an eastern region of a small island to the south of the Indonesian archipelago, in 1975. One third of the native population has since been exterminated by Indonesian troops.

For the children of the orphanage outside the capital, Dili, sixteen years on, their memories of the jungle remain



a nightmare. An orphanage worker recalls:

"They told how they slept by day and ran ... by night, sometimes stepping on the squelching bodies of the wounded who had been left to die ... I committed a terrible mistake one morning, I thought we'd play hide and seek to amuse the children ... I told her (Amelia, aged five) to keep quiet and not move a muscle, but she thought she was back in the jungle...she started screaming and sobbing ..." (The Observer 7/4/91)

British Aerospace, one of Britain's largest and most successful manufacturers, is also Britain's biggest arms exporting company. It has been actively engaged in arms sales to Indonesia for many years, and seeks arms contracts from every continent; from Asia, across the Middle East, to Africa, Europe and the Americas.

BAe pursued a deal for Hawk fighter aircraft with Saddam Hussein in 1988 which was prevented from going through by groups such as the Campaign Against Arms Trade. Had the sale been sealed, it might well have resulted in public embarrassment for the British government.

Such ironies have occurred in the past - British-made weaponry was used by Argentine forces against British troops during the Falklands War.

The problem of arming future

Saddams, of British-made weapons causing so much misery across the world will however remain unsolved unless concerted action is taken at the national level.

Many workers in military industry would prefer not to work on missiles, tanks and fighter aircraft, but when jobs come to depend on such sales, working parents are faced with the dilemma of not providing for their families or proceeding to work on exports which will only be the cause of another family's distress.

One solution would be to convert military firms into civilian production. The idea of conversion has been floated by Trade Unions and workers for many years, but management and the Government have until recently proved resilient to such change.

Following the Gulf War, the dangers of the arms trade have caught international attention. Calls for controls on arms exports and for measures to counter the secrecy of the trade, have been made by each of the major arms exporting countries, Britain included. Such moves are unprecedented.

While calls for controlling the arms trade may well be tempered by the continued desire to sell, it may be possible that the recent Crisis has provided the impetus for change. It could be that the children of the future may well come to know of the arms trade only through their history books.

# Old lies revisited

## Old lies revisited

A book by Winifred Whitehead  
Pluto Press

THIS IS an important book about an important subject: violence and war in children's literature. The subject is all the more relevant in the aftermath of the bloody slaughter inflicted on the Iraqi's to the satisfaction of politicians and commentators of all persuasions in Britain. Joan Ruddock would do well to read this impressive, committed volume.

Winifred Whitehead provides an exhaustive survey of themes in poetry, fiction and memoir, looking, among other things, at the literature of the War in the Trenches, The Blitz, Hiroshima and the Holocaust. There are also useful chapters on "Women and War" and "The Poetry of War".

What she is concerned with is the way that children's literature portrays violence and war. She recognises that this is, unfortunately, an important area of human activity that cannot be ignored no matter how distasteful, but goes on to ask of her chosen authors whether they endorse or question, whether they celebrate or oppose. At one level her account is an all too depressing catalogue of the horrors of the twentieth century but through it all she traces the spark of humanity, the glimmer of hope.

There are two problems with the book, however. First is an inevitable disagreement over her assessment of some individual authors. She is, I feel, too censorious of Robert Cosmier and Robert Westall. Other readers will

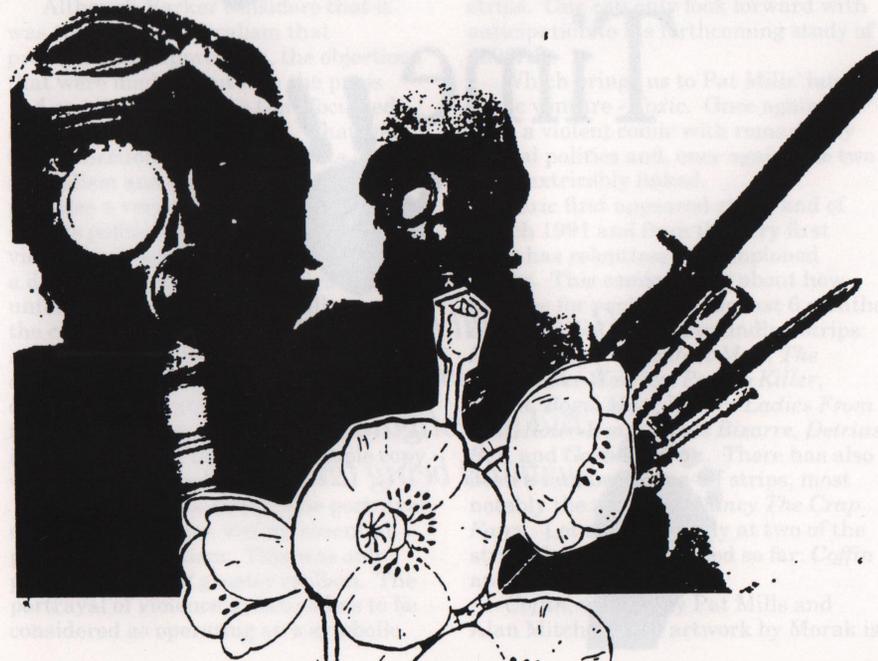
certainly agree or disagree with her individual judgments and this is only to be expected.

Another more important problem derives from her pacifism and concerns the question, in her own phrase, of "Fighting Back". While one can be opposed to war and violence in general for the suffering, destruction, slaughter and inhumanity that it brings, does this mean that one opposes all wars in particular.

What about resistance to oppression, to exploitation, to the conqueror. It is all too easy today to condemn the First World War or the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but what about the resistance to the Nazis, the Vietcong fighting the Americans, the Hungarians opposing the Russian tanks in 1956, the Mau Mau result against the British, the Intifada ...

This point is recognised and considered by Winifred Whitehead, and she does confess that Primo Levi's marvellous novel of Jewish resistance, *If Not Now When* gave her pause, but in the end she insists there must be some other way than confrontation and violence. This is not a tenable position as far as this reviewer is concerned. The right of the oppressed and exploited to use violence against the violence of their oppressors has to be recognised.

Despite this disagreement, however, the book is an important contribution on a vital subject. Every school should have a copy of this book and every teacher should read it. It gave this reviewer much food for thought and there are a number of novels that I shall be seeking out on her recommendation.



# A horror hit

## The Crystal Prison

## The Final Reckoning

Two novels by Robin Jarvis  
Purnell, £3.50 and £3.99

*THE CRYSTAL PRISON* and *The Final Reckoning* are the second and third volumes of Robin Jarvis's *Deptford Mice* trilogy. They are both magnificent examples of children's horror fiction. Audrey, Piccadilly, Oswald, Thomas Triton and the other mice take on the evil that threatens to engulf the whole world. Predictably, the demonic Jupiter is defeated, but victory is marked by irretrievable loss. This is children's fiction of the highest order. Jarvis is a writer to watch out for.

# A disappointment

## The Skybreaker

A novel by Ann Halam  
Orchard, £8.95

*THE SKYBREAKER* by Ann Halam is the third of her novels, for older readers about Zanne and the Covener. She is sent away from Island to discover and to put to rest the danger that threatens neighbouring Magia. The book is well-written and, in place, quite effective, but it has nothing like the power of the earlier volumes *The Daymaker* and *Transformations*. The psychology of Zanne's main protagonist, Lady Monkshood, is totally unconvincing and this undermines the whole book. This is a great shame.

Although this seems likely to be the last book about Zanne, one can only hope that Ann Halam can be persuaded to switch on her word processor again and complete the series more memorably.

# Give it a miss

## Down Came a Blackbird

A boy's story by Nicholas Wilde  
Collins, £8.99, pp202, hardback

A WORKING class 13 year old rude lout from London, whose father is gone and mother a dying alcoholic, is taken on by his rich bachelor great uncle. Gradually he is reclaimed to his true class inheritance, and even turns out to be almost nice.

It may, as another review is quoted as saying, be "A haunting story, unfolded so beautifully", but the values in it are repugnant.

It's expertly written and very readable, but what do you expect from an author who was educated in Cheltenham and at King's College, Cambridge.

# Just like breathing

## Learning All the Time

A book by John Holt  
Addison-Wesley, pp169  
Also published by Education Now

OVER the years, from writing *How Children Fail*, John Holt moved from being an advocate of school reform to an advocate of de-schooling. This movement was influenced by the time he spent at Cuernavaca with Ivan Illich and Holt became the main spokesperson for the 'home educators' and de-schoolers. With his death in 1985, the alternative education movement lost its major proponent.

This book, published posthumously, is an answer to the critics of de-schooling who cannot imagine that education for reading, writing and arithmetic can possibly take place anywhere other than the school and that structured, graded, assessed, teacher-related 'education' is the only method which assures a grounding in the basics. John Holt planned to demonstrate that this view is evidently false.

Let us take one example of this. On pages 28-31, in a passage entitled "How not to learn to read", Holt points out that the number of words in children's readers has decreased from an average of 645 in the 1920s to 153 in 1962. This, however, has not produced any great increase in the literacy rate. As John Taylor Gatto remarked in his speech on receiving the New York City "Teacher of the Year Award":

"Now here is a curious point to ponder. Senator Ted Kennedy's office released a paper not too long ago claiming that prior to compulsory education the state, (Mass), literacy rate was 98% and after it the figure never again reached above 91% where it stands in 1990."

Taken together, these two statements should make us question the desirability of compulsory education, even in the basics.

In many ways this book is similar to his others. It is written in his usually easy-to-read, anecdotal style; it shows his great ability to see things from the child's point of view and he suggests ways in which adults can help (or rather, not hinder) the child to learn. And as usual, the implications of taking his arguments seriously are vast. If we did so, we would automatically be involved in countering the time discipline, the overly 'scientific' interpretation of learning and the supposed 'efficiency' of education. In other words, we would have to admit

that our whole concept of education needs dismantling and we should return to recognising the educational nature of everyday life. Following Goodman, Holt would agree that education is no substitute for growing up in a meaningful world.

For Holt, learning is akin to breathing. Children learn unless something stops them. In this case it is usually adults who, for whatever well-meant reasons, hinder and eventually stop the child from learning. From his observations of young children, Holt shows that we do not

need to coerce or manipulate, or prepare exotic environments or plan and order learning. Children will learn if they are not prevented from doing so. Holt might be criticised for the informality of his research. Certainly it would not pass academic 'standards'. This, however, misses the point - it is those very standards which, when applied to children's learning, do the harm.

This book will be a useful addition to the arguments for alternatives to schooling, but we should be prepared to re-assess ourselves and our world if we intend to take it seriously.

"A capstone to his ten books on education."

—The New York Times Book Review

John Holt  
Learning  
All the  
Time

How small children begin  
to read, write, count,  
and investigate the world,  
without being taught

# Violent comix

## Action: The story of a violent comic.

A book by Martin Barker  
Titan Books, £14.95

## Toxic, numbers 1-28

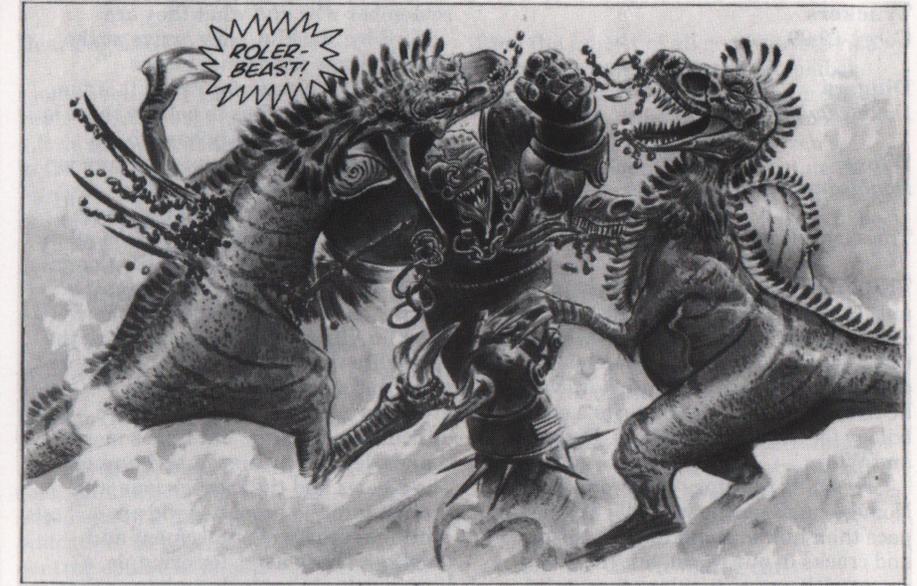
MARTIN Barker's book is a brief account of the history of *Action* comic which introduces over 250 pages of reprinted material from the *Hookjaw*, *Look Out For Lefty*, *Death Game* 1999, *Kids Rule OK* and *Dredger* strips. In his introduction, Barker emphasises the success of *Action* with sales rising to 180,000 a week and one of the biggest postbags of any comic. There was a fantastic level of commitment and identification from its regular readers who saw the comic as speaking up on their behalf, as showing the world as it appeared to them.

Most of the credit for this goes to Pat Mills. He was given a free hand to produce something new and exciting by publishers IPC who were desperate to reverse the decline in comic sales. The result was something that was different, realistic, something that was "truly radical".

In the event the comic was suppressed at the end of October 1976, returning in a cleaned up form with the violence toned down and the anti-establishment politics removed. It promptly went into decline. Although he cannot prove it, Barker reports that it was widely believed at the time that it was pressure from W.H. Smith that secured its suspension and emasculation. All was not lost, however because *Action* had prepared the way for *2000AD*.

Although Barker considers that it was the comic's radicalism that prompted its suppression, the objections that were made about it in the press and on television at the time focussed on its portrayal of violence. What was the connection if any between its radicalism and its violence? Barker provides a very useful account of the comic's politics (its cynical and hostile view of authority, its portrayal of life as a desperate struggle for survival), but unfortunately he does not really explore the connection between its radicalism and its violence. Instead, he concentrates on arguing - very convincingly let it be said - against the idea that the portrayal of violence induces violence, that young people copy what they read and view.

This misses the point. The portrayal of violence in *Action* was an essential part of its radicalism. This was only partly a matter of greater realism. The portrayal of violence in *Action* has to be considered as operating on a symbolic



level. This works in two ways: first of all it was recognised as being unacceptable to adult authority, as shocking, even challenging adult sensibilities. Secondly, the violence was a way of registering an extreme rejection of society values, of indicating the degree of hostility towards the Establishment and its supporters. The portrayal of violence has to be regarded as a two-fingered gesture and was recognised as such by both the comic's readers and its critics. Barker's account lacks any serious discussion of this symbolic function.

Despite this gap in his argument, however, he is to be unreservedly congratulated for an important contribution to comic history and for making available again some fine comic strips. One can only look forward with anticipation to his forthcoming study of *2000AD*.

Which brings us to Pat Mills' latest comic venture - *Toxic*. Once again we have a violent comic with remarkably radical politics and, once again, the two are inextricably linked.

*Toxic* first appeared at the end of March 1991 and from the very first issue has relentlessly championed excess. This comic boasts about how bad it is for you! Over the last 6 months it has carried some outstanding strips: *Marshall Law*, *Accident Man*, *The Driver*, *Sex Warrior*, *Psycho Killer*, *Coffin*, *Bogie Man*, *Dinner Ladies From Hell*, *Roler-Beast*, *Brats Bizarre*, *Detrius Rex*, and *Garbage Man*. There has also been a number of one-off strips, most notably the amazing *Nancy The Crap Fairy*. Let us look briefly at two of the strips that have appeared so far: *Coffin* and *Sex Warrior*.

*Coffin*, written by Pat Mills and Alan Mitchell with artwork by Morak is

the story of a supernatural being who comes to New York seeking vengeance for what has been done to Africa. The ensuing bloodbath is necessary to save the continent because as Coffin tells his victims, "No one is innocent". This strip is definitely not a call for Western charity for the poor, backward, starving Africans, but is instead a declaration of outrage at what the West has done to Africa.

*Sex Warrior*, written by Pat Mills and Tony Skinner with artwork by Will Simpson, tells of the Future Age War. The old and the rich, the Wrinklies, have found a way to halt the ageing process and now rule forever over the young. They have imposed a repressive morality, enforced by their Steroid Warriors and by their moral icons, (clones of Cliff Richard!). Challenging their rule are the Sex Warriors, young people, mainly women, who can turn their sex drive into a powerful weapon capable of defeating the worst that the Wrinklies can send against them.

Both these satires are accompanied by the graphic portrayal of violence. This is not gratuitous, however; rather it is absolutely essential to the dramatic power of the strips. The violence is once again a symbolic representation of the comic's radicalism. The extremism of the strips, the extent to which they oppose and challenge conventional attitudes, is demonstrated by images of violence. These are stories of struggle, of conflict and this is reflected in the artwork. From this point of view the portrayal of violence in these strips is a crucial part of the way in which they give expression to their radicalism.

Certainly *Toxic* is by far the best comic published in Britain today. Buy it and see! Long may it continue!

John Newsinger

## The gaps and cracks in our world

**Truckers**  
Corgi £2.99

**Diggers**  
Doubleday £8.95

**Wings**  
Doubleday £8.99

Three novels by Terry Pratchett

TERRY Pratchett is best known as the author of the *Discworld* novels, a series of comic fantasies for adults to which there seems no end. In between churning out these volumes, however, he has also found time to write a comic trilogy for children, *Truckers*, *Diggers* and *Wings*.

This tells the story of a group of Nomes, small people who live at a faster pace than humans and inhabit the gaps and cracks in our world, but the story starts with one particular community living beside a motorway in England, a community that is facing extinction. They migrate to survive, and without realising it, activate the Thing, an advanced computer that helps them

remember who and what they are.

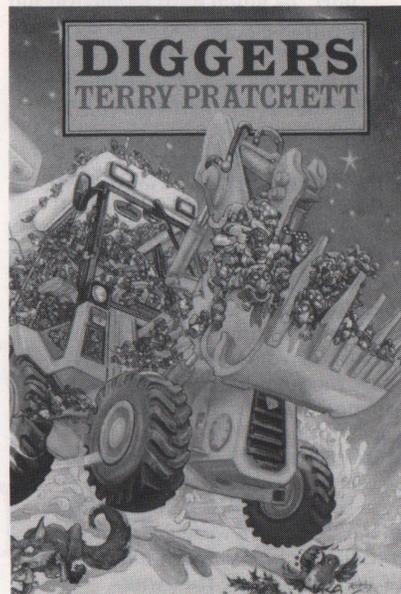
Led by Masklin, they arrive at the Store, a large department store inhabited by Nomes for whom it is the world and who refuse to believe there is anything outside. They have to be convinced quickly because the Store is due for demolition!

The three volumes go on to relate their hilarious adventures, first of all in the Store, then hiding out in the quarry where Grimma, a female Nome saves the day, and lastly in America where Masklin, finally makes contact with the spaceship that originally brought them to earth thousands of years ago.

Some of Pratchett's writing is a bit difficult for children, but this is more than redeemed by his wit and humour. The Nomes and the incongruous way they fit into the human world are a continual source of amusement and laughter. They have, for example, a literal attitude towards notices so that when they see a sign that says ROAD WORKS AHEAD this obviously a helpful assurance that the road ahead is working! They are also continually amazed by that synthetic material,

Polyputtthekettleon! And so on.

This is a marvellous series of novels with feminist commitment and wry observations about religion thrown in. Highly recommended.



## Free Book

**1992 and the New World: 500 Years of Resistance**

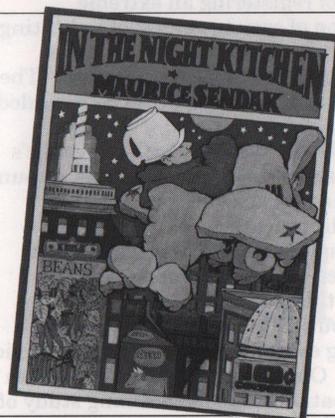
A book from Leicester-Masaya Link Group  
10a Bishop St LE1 6SAF (0533 540955)  
Free (27p stamp + A4 envelope required), 36pp.

PUBLICLY 1992 is seen as the dawn of a new united Europe with renewed power and affluence. The USA and Spain are spending millions in Seville, especially, and elsewhere celebrating the 'discovery' of America.

The book draws these themes together with the growth of racism, often through the state, in Europe, the widening gap between rich and poor, third world debt, starvation and massive amount of child-mortality and refugees.

The book is a compilation of pieces by a parish priest from the Andalusian village of Las Corrales, protecting the employment rights of olive workers through also being the President of the Agricultural Workers' Union, a look at Mayan cultural identity, Tomas Borge of Nicaragua and an Asian view of 1492 - 1992.

It is an excellent resource which should be sent for before the print run is exhausted. It is hoped that it will be the first of a series: it is planned that the next volume will be about the Caribbean.



## It's back

**The Night Kitchen**

A picture book with words by Maurice Sendak  
Picture Lions, 3.99

IT'S back: this strange, strange book. A new publisher, but it's not lost its magic. It is an inexplicable masterpiece with its exaggerated pictures and brief lunatic text which young children find so appealing.

## Watch the birdie

**Bird Habitats - Resources for Basic Literacy and the National Curriculum**

A book by Suzanne Brown  
Taking Wing Educational Resources,  
Lower Chelwell, Ludgvan, Penzance,  
Cornwall, TR20 8BL. £15.00 + p&p., 38pp.

THIS BOOK is interesting in that it was road tested with some Education Otherwise children before it went to press. It is also a DIY job. Brown has created, had it printed and published and distributed on her own account there's no chance of a penny of its purchase price going to Rupert Murdoch or any other publishing baron.

Essentially it consists of text and line drawings. The right hand pages

have pictures tasks, questions and ideas for further study. The left hand pages are carefully selected textual information.

The sheets are freely photocopyable "within the institution": this could make it economic for some people to use. The line drawings are clear enough for people with normal vision and it is expected that reference books, preferably in colour, would be used to back up the resource. The informational text could be in larger print.

Provided that it was not rammed down the throats of unwilling kids (it is not designed to be - but some schools can make learning such a pain) this would be a useful resource to have. It is obtainable from the address above.

## In search of free schools

Dear Lib ED,

As a parent of an 18 month old, and who may well return to England in a few years time, I'd be interested in getting some information about 'free schools' back in the old country. There are a handful here - all fee-paying but based on income and even less if part-time work is contributed - and should we still be here when schooling age is reached then we'll probably find out just how good or bad they are.

Whether called 'free schools' or something else, the sort of 'school' I'd be interested in finding out about is one that is small in size, with small classes, that involves teachers/parents/children in the organisation of the school, where learning is unstructured and geared to individual needs, where there is an absence of authoritarian behaviour, and understanding and providing all round stimulation and opportunity.

Apart from a few aspects, such a description may even fit some of the better examples of schools within the state-organised primary school system in Britain. But it can also be hit and miss and it's hard to find a school that covers all aspects.

I would imagine, too, that 'free schools' are no longer in existence, leaving just the private schools that just happen to be run on largely libertarian lines, the odd 'community school' that is really a village school, state-run but 'libertarian' merely because of its size, and perhaps a inner-city co-operative experiment (a la White Lion). I hope I am wrong.

If there is such a thing as a list of free schools (or schools that roughly fall within the description I have given above), with a short description of each school, then this would be ideal to send to me and I can then contact the individual schools for more information. I know you publish an excellent magazine (or did), which I used to purchase from outlets when I lived in England, but I am unfortunately not in a position to afford an overseas subscription - hence my request for a digest of information relating to free schools.

I trust you will be able to meet my request and I enclose two reply paid coupons for your reply.

Yours faithfully,

**Terry Harrison**  
Fitzroy  
AUSTRALIA

## Prisoners of Conscience

Dear Lib ED,

I joined Amnesty International last year. I couldn't get a clear answer from a local group on compulsory education in the declaration of human rights. However, national level gave a clear answer that membership implies no opinion on any issue unrelated to prisoners and they denied, in writing, that compulsory education is a human right.

Now, Amnesty's June journal published praise of a school class in Peebles which wrote letters to South Korea. I wrote to the Journal as follows:

"I might shrug off your (non)publication of my joining Amnesty while denying that compulsory education, as repressive thought control, can be a human right, but now your encouraging school classes to write letters is a worrying trend.

I make no accusations against this particular school, but it is well known that school projects are usually decided on by teacher discipline which sweeps pupils into compulsory participation regardless of their own (as distinct from their parents') CONSCIENCES.

The possibility of any letters having been written under duress must detract

from the impact of all genuine letters upon governments. Please remember that school children are an underclass in our society, who would have more time to write letters if they weren't oppressed by homework, and state in print that you have ascertained these and all future school group letters to be entirely voluntary."

I see that this month that there is no coverage of these worries from me or anyone else. It would be ironic if Amnesty themselves are going to ignore letter writers, they will hardly encourage us to believe that governments won't. I have certainly not stopped writing, but I am worried that Amnesty will make nonsense of the whole letter writing exercise by tacitly condoning compulsion.

Why are they avoiding this question? They are supposed to stand for freedom of speech. I suggest that it feels like time to apply some public opinion on Amnesty, to grasp the need for letters to be voluntary to be genuine. I have also written to the BBC asking the next Prisoners of Conscience series to formally advise against compulsion of children in their letter writing pack.

**Maurice Frank**

## Child Slaves

Dear Lib ED,

I should take you up on the negative note in your review of *Child Slaves*. I do not think - nor write - that benevolent capitalism can save the world, or its children. At best I think public opinion can mitigate the worst excesses undertaken in its name, not through shame but through assaulting corporations' economic self-interest. That, after all, was what brought the slave trade to an end.

And the shareholder point is advanced both because people ask: What can I do? and because shareholder power is the unrealised side of the coin of Thatcher's much-vaunted shareowning democracy.

Insofar that the situations of which I write are brought about by the economic domination of the West, of course I concur that throwing off that yoke is the only way to freedom, but easier said than done. Strong though the NPA are in the Philippines, they don't stand a chance against the American-backed forces of capital, and the Quiet

Revolution was no revolution at all: "Cory is worse than Marcos". Where things had gone well - Chile in the 70s, Nicaragua in the 80s - it was absolutely no surprise to find Uncle Sam doing his worst.

Look at the cynicism of supporting Saddam right up to and again immediately after the Gulf War. Self-seeking big power interest will remain the dominant player for the foreseeable future. I honestly think the only hope is to alert the crowd to pressurise for play a bit more by the rules.

But do I think there really is much hope? No I do not.

Yours sincerely,

**Peter Lee-Wright**

**We always welcome any correspondence from our readers. Please write to Lib ED, Phoenix House, 170 Wells Road, Bristol, BS4 2AG.**