

Groups and Resources

Lib ED contacts

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

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

Unit 2D, Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London N1 3QP
071-226 1633
(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

36 Kinross Road, Leamington Spa, CV32 7EF
Helpline: 0926 886828
(For everyone who practices or supports the right of children to learn without schooling)

Campaign Against Military Research On Campus (CAMROC)

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

Bad Attitude

121 Railton Road, Brixton, London
(A radical women's newspaper intent on overthrowing civilisation as we know it. A sub to this new magazine costs £5)

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)

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)

Kate Sharpley Library

BM Hurricane, London WC1 3XX
(archival centre covering class struggle anarchist tradition)

National Association for Young People in Care

20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN
071-284 4793

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)

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)

National Union of Teachers

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

Global Futures Project

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

Kilquhanity House School

Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland

Blackcurrent Otherwise Project

24 St Michaels Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ

Skool Bus Project

24 Clive Street, Hereford, HR1 2SB

Summerhill School

Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY

Sands School

48 East Street, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7AX
0364 53666

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 17

International

Global Free School

525-3 Imazu-Machi Takasago-Cho, Takasago City, Japan

Nonami Children's Village

28-341 Nonami, Tenpaku-cho, Nagoya City, Japan

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

SAC (Syndikalisterna)

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

Familial, Day Nursery Kindergarten

PO Box 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal

Grupo Impulso Libertario

CC984, 2000 Rosario, Argentina

Graine d'Ecole

La Paillerie, Avenue de Bardenac, 33600 PESSAC, France

Les Enfants d'Abord

c/o Nicole et Michel TERILLON, La Souche, 42940 CHATELNEUF, France
tel: 77 76 84 70

Assn. Nationale pour l'Education Nouvelle

1 rue des Nefliers, 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
(They publish "Alternative Teacher" in English.)

Asociacion Antipatriarcal

Apartado Correos 52018, Madrid, Spain

Free Schools in Vienna

Verein Wiener Alternativschulen, Hofmuhlgasse 2, A-1060 Wien, PO Box 172, Austria

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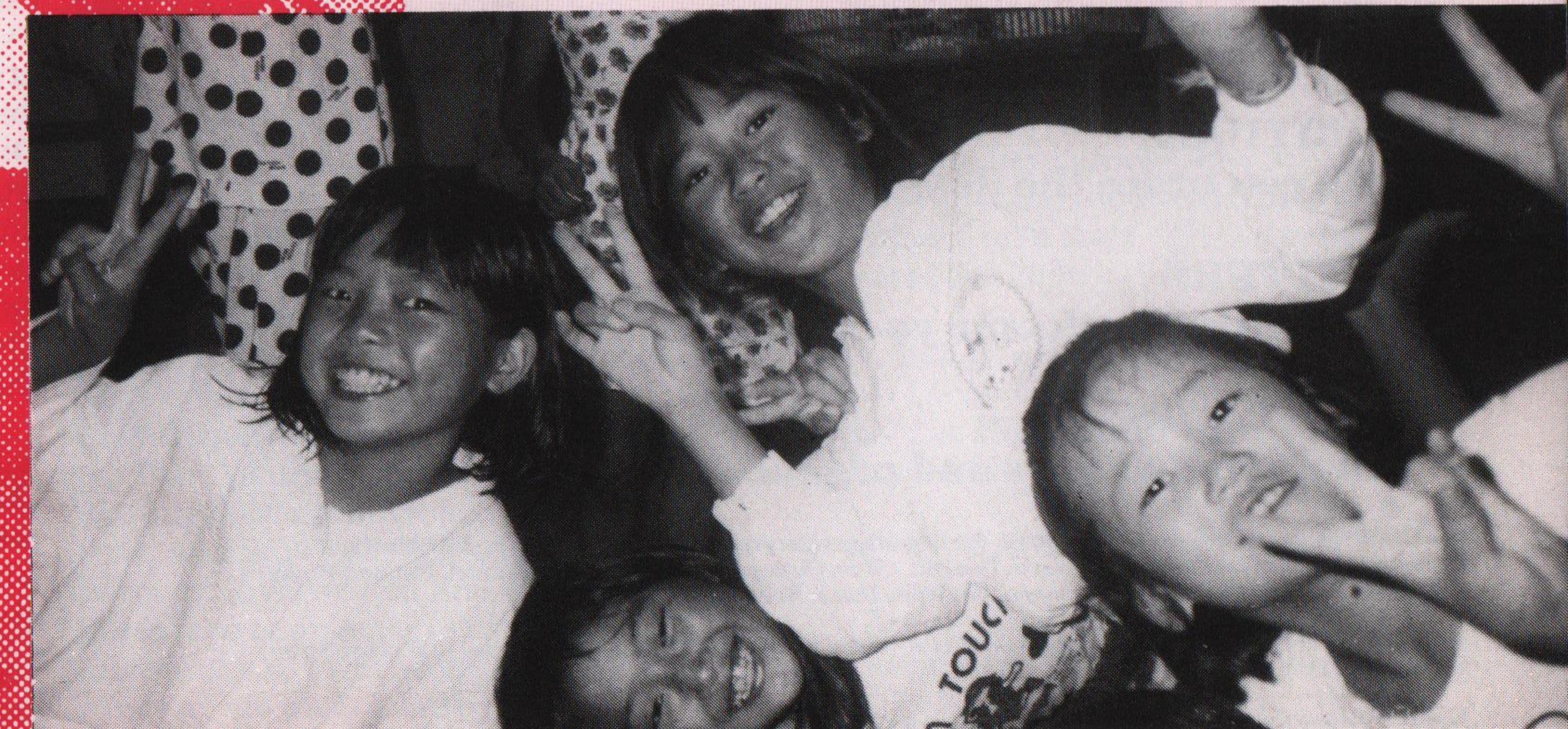
*Reading, Writing and
Regurgitation
Tests that make a mockery of
learning*

Woodcraft Folk

*Who are
these
mysterious
creatures?
All is
revealed
inside.*



*Land of the rising sun
Free schools thriving in Japan*



A magazine for the

liberation of learning

Japan - is there an alternative?

John Potter considers the possibilities for alternative education in authoritarian Japan.

IN MARCH 1991, the parents of a 13 year old boy, who had hanged himself in a public lavatory following a lengthy period of bullying at school, were awarded just a fraction of the amount of compensation they had claimed against both the school and their son's tormentors. In handing down the ruling the judge agreed that the defendants should have stopped the victim from being punched and kicked, but, also that bullying had not taken place. The events leading to the suicide were seen as necessary character-building for Japanese students. The parents of the dead boy had revealed that their son was forced in one incident to run around Nakano Fujimi Junior High School with a moustache painted on his face. In another, students and four teachers had circulated a funeral card on which memorial wishes were written to the boy as if he had died.

In July of the same year a citizens' group met in Kobe to commemorate the first anniversary of the killing of a local high school girl. The 15-year-old had died from injuries suffered when she was caught between the gatepost and the school gate. The gate was closed on her by a vigilant teacher shutting out latecomers as she dashed to her first class of the day.

And in July 1992 the headmaster and nine instructors from the Totsuka Yachting School for delinquent children, in Mihama, were given suspended sentences and terms of probation following the deaths of four youths at the school. They had died in three separate incidents between 1980 and 1982. Two of the students died as a result of injuries inflicted by instructors - the other two 15-year-olds drowned when they jumped from a boat during

an attempted escape from the school. Their bodies have never been recovered. While criticizing the over-enthusiastic methods employed by this expensive private school, the judge also acknowledged that he thought corporal punishment was an effective means to reform some delinquent students. The mother of one of the dead boys, whose son had died just eight days after entering the school, burst into tears on hearing the lenient sentences passed at the court - the prosecution had asked for a ten year prison term for the 51 year old headmaster, Hiroshi Totsuka, who continues to operate the school.

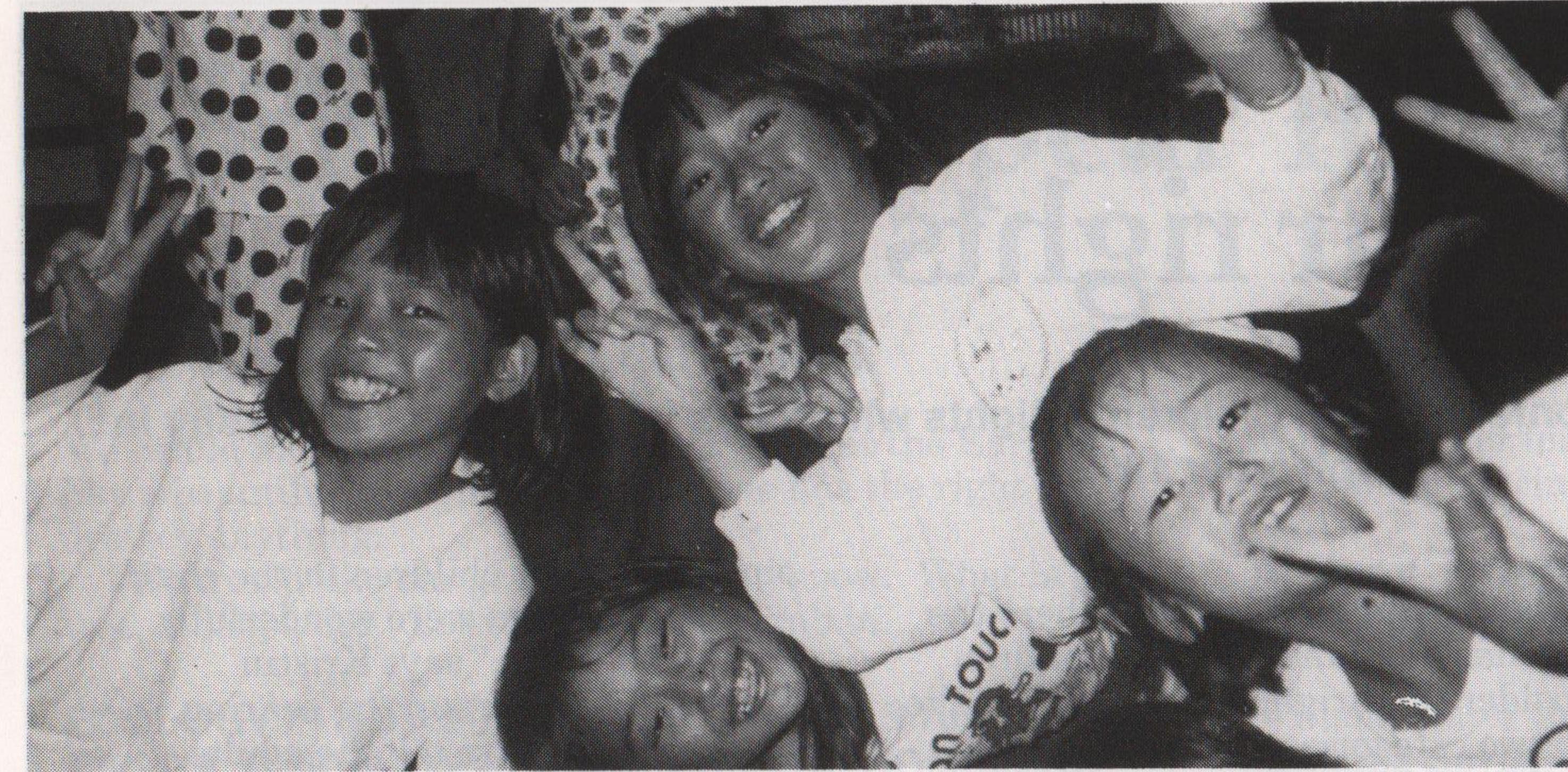
These horror stories from Japan may not be typical, but what is perhaps more frightening is the widespread acceptance of the rigid hierarchical education system, despite lip service paid by many to the need for change. From an early age the Japanese child is brought up to be aware of its place in the hierarchy of family, school and society. Despite this strict socialization process - or perhaps because of it - most children do not see their teachers as antagonists or school as any kind of battleground. In fact, in attitude polls conducted among children of several countries, the Japanese scored highest in 'liking school'.

At high school level Japanese students learn to sit still for long periods of time and to care about details; to have thoughts but not to express them, and not to challenge authority. The large chunks of information fed to the students must then be remembered and reproduced at entrance examinations in order for 'success' to be achieved. In a society where there are a large number of, mostly private, colleges and

universities, and where a high proportion of the population goes on to further education, it is entry to the 'good' university that is prized most and which will ensure later acceptance into the higher echelons of society. To this end it is the entrance examinations which take on massive importance. Once inside the university, life for the new student will be surprisingly relaxed following the years of toil and struggle to get in. Ability tends to be rated solely on the basis of which school or university has been attended.

So what place is there for alternative education in modern Japan? It comes as a shock perhaps to realize that the rigid rote-learning-based system has not always been the only way here. As early as the beginning of this century the ideas of John Dewey were introduced to Japan, along with those of other innovators. However, such things as flexible curricula and child-centredness were introduced only into private schools located in large cities or into 'laboratory schools' affiliated to other schools and universities. Eventually the government saw the growing influence of the new concepts as a threat to established educational practice and their use was formally prohibited.

As the large numbers enrolled at juku (cram schools) testify, the majority of people in this country still do not really want change. While bemoaning the ridiculous emphasis on test-taking and entrance examinations, they have little choice but to play the game if they don't want to see their children left behind. Moderation is a losing strategy in this rat-race and although the media from time to time decry all the conformism, it is not an important issue for most parents. The juku has become an



Bedtime at Kinokuni

important part of the Japanese educational system. A newspaper article reported this year that more than 60% of 13-year-olds surveyed in Osaka began going to juku when nine or ten years old and now study an average of four to six hours 6 after school every day. (And more than half the children in one Tokyo nursery school go to bed after 10 pm). Not surprisingly, the sales of 'stamina drinks' produced for tired children have doubled in the past five years.

Nevertheless, there are some Japanese who are trying to introduce alternatives to this punishing regimen. Within the system many teachers have pressed for changes, and a small number of laboratory or experimental schools attached to state universities still exist. In Nara, for example, there is a primary school attached to the prestigious Nara Women's University which does not follow the strict diet of textbooks prescribed by the Ministry and which attempts to introduce lessons emanating from the children's own interests and experience. There are also a number of schools operating independently which include not just individualized learning but varying degrees of self-government. These places are, however, completely outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and are not formally recognized as schools. In Takasago there exists the Global School run by Kazu Kojima and two staff. Kojima's school, in a shabby traditional style Japanese house, is a boarding school catering mainly for truants or school refusers - a rapidly increasing problem in Japan. At present there are eight students, most of them teenagers. There is a daily self-government meeting when plans for the rest of the day are discussed, and no scheduled timetable of any kind. Another non-recognized school is the Nonami Village, in Nagoya, which was begun in 1986 by a group led by Kuniko Kato. Here, a handful of primary- and nursery-age children are taught. Inspired by the example of A.S. Neill, there is also a self-government meeting at this day

school. Kojima and Kato, in their different ways have provided a much needed alternative for a few children. In addition, Kojima organizes the Global Bridge Centre from his home - a resource centre where he gathers and distributes information on radical alternatives in education.

It is A.S. Neill who has made the biggest impact on Japanese alternative education in recent years, having been first introduced to Japan by Seishi Shimoda, a teacher who met Neill at Summerhill back in 1928, and became Neill's translator. Following the war, Neill's books were published in Japanese for the first time and were given a favourable reception. On Shimoda's death (the same year as Neill's, 1973) the work of translating and promoting the Neillian gospel was taken over by Shinichiro Hori. The A.S. Neill Association which Hori organized had over four hundred members by the late 1980s and some Japanese parents were beginning to send their children to Summerhill. At the present time about one third of the Summerhill community is made up of Japanese children.

Hori himself is Professor of Primary

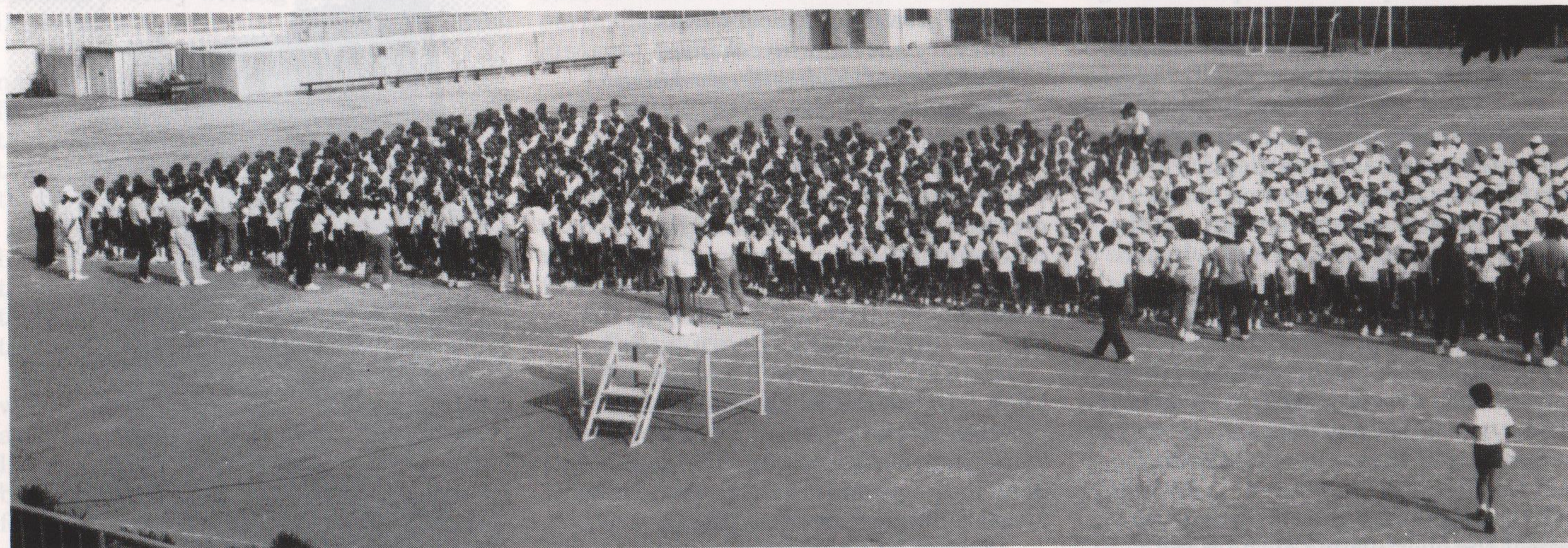
Shinichiro Hori at Kinokuni



Education at Osaka City University, in addition to his work as promoter of Neillian ideas in Japan. Not content with encouraging parents to send their children to Summerhill, he has now begun his own boarding school, Kinokuni Children's Village, in the mountainous countryside of Wakayama. The school is loosely based on Summerhill itself, and attempts to blend the dual inspirations of Neill and Dewey.

The school opened to a blaze of publicity from the media in April 1992, and Hori wants Kinokuni to become a school where the best ideas of both Neill and Dewey are combined in 'an integration of free emotions and free intellect'. He has been lucky enough to find an idyllic and isolated site high up in the mountains above the small town of Hashimoto, and was helped in this by the efforts of enthusiastic parents, sponsors, and members of the Neill Association. What is most significant for alternative education and for Japan, however, is that Kinokuni has been recognized by the Ministry as an independent school. The importance of this can hardly be over-emphasized, as it is the very first alternative school to be granted that status in Japan.

Kinokuni has attracted attention from the media throughout Japan and is being carefully watched in its early days. Hori has the unenviable task of coping with the attentions of the Ministry while at the same time trying to push ahead with his own vision of happy, free children growing up in a place where there are voluntary lessons and self-government. So far the adventure is working, and the school has the maximum number of 95 children, aged between six and twelve. If successful, Hori hopes to add a junior high school at some time in the future. At the very least he aims to show Japanese people that there is another way.



'Rehearsal' for Sports Day at a Kobe Primary School

Stand up, stand up! Stand up for your rights

David Gribble reports on the World Conference On Children's Rights which was held at Exeter University in September 1992.

DID YOU read about this conference anywhere?

I thought not. I haven't seen it mentioned.

Have you read a list of the children's rights in the UN charter? I hadn't.

Do you know about Stuart Hart's research about the implementation of these rights all over the world? I didn't.

Do you know about the empowering work of Learning Through Landscapes, Underground Power and The Voice of the Children? Did you know about the Children's Hearing at Rio, during the UN conference on the environment? I didn't.

These were some of the topics at the



conference, but there were over thirty talks, workshops and presentations. Participants were only able to attend a few of them.

To make up for this there was an evaluation panel of twenty young people from three different local schools, who publicly reviewed all the talks and workshops at the end of the first and final days.

If you count these evaluations, five of the sessions were given by children. Although most of those present were British, at least twelve other countries were represented.

This was an unusual and important conference, and I fear that the reason that it was overlooked by the national media must be that children's rights are not seen as an important issue.

Part of Stuart Hart's research involved asking people to rank the various rights from the UN charter as "of no importance", "of some importance", "important", "very important" or "of the greatest importance".

In one country, unnamed, children's rights are thought to be only "of some importance". This is in the eyes of the children themselves. It appears that where few rights are granted, even children attach little importance to

them.

In most other countries where the data has been analysed the children consider their rights to be in one of the top two categories, and so do their teachers, but in every case, whether rights are considered very important or not, the level of implementation is thought to leave much to be desired.

To readers of *Lib ED* this will not be a surprising conclusion, but it is welcome to find it supported by university research.

During the conference I was delighted to hear Jackie Cousins, of Oxford Polytechnic, demonstrating with the support of videos that even babies are able to choose wisely how and what they will learn, showing that the awkward question "When do you start allowing children to decide for themselves?" has a straightforward answer - "As soon as they are born."

It was a pleasure to see pupils from Sands School, where I had been teaching until the end of the summer term, present a video and question-and-answer session which gave some idea of the absolute sharing in decision-making that is possible, and the good sense shown by children when they are given proper responsibility: the evaluator described Sands as the light at the end of the tunnel.

I was delighted by the way Learning Through Landscapes was encouraging children within conventional education to think for themselves about their own environments, and to make their own demands from those in authority.

But what impressed me most deeply was the work of Voice of the Children.

Voice of the Children gives children the chance to speak their minds directly



to the people in power, whether it be at a local, national or international level. It started in Norway in 1990.

Ten children, two judges and six leading national figures met in front of an audience of 1400 with the Norwegian

ombudsman for children in the chair.

"The children were wonderfully frank and direct," says Kristin Eskeland, who set up the hearing. "They were able to tell the adults exactly how they felt and what they wanted the decision-makers to do. The International Campaign Voice of the Children was launched to give children all over the world the same opportunity to speak their minds to decision-makers in their own countries."

The most impressive of these children's hearings, as they are called, was the Global Children's Hearing at the UN Conference in Rio. We heard tape-recorded extracts from this hearing. It was extremely moving.

"I dream of a world free from social distinctions, pollution, drugs, weapons, above all a world full of unselfishness, a



world for everybody no matter what tribe or race," said 11-year-old Paul Gassis.

It did not surprise me to hear that one of the male interpreters who was translating for a girl from Rwanda actually broke down in tears. There is a copy of the children's appeal to world leaders at the end of this article.

To judge from only the workshops and seminars I attended, the principal message of the conference was about the importance of children's perceptions.

Becoming an adult is not all good; one of the things adults learn to do is to make excuses for not living up to the demands of their consciences. We get so good at this that we are inclined to forget that we have done it.

Children are more honest. They have not learnt our hypocrisy. That is why it hurts so much when they tell us what we ought to do, and we know they are right, and even experienced translators weep.

People's understanding of children's rights varies greatly. Even at this conference, where children's rights were the central topic, there were adults

Children's Appeal To World Leaders

WE WANT TO INHERIT A CLEAN EARTH.

We would like everybody to understand that the Earth is like a beautiful garden in which no one has the right to destroy anything.

We would like our grandchildren to know: What is a tree, a fish, a dog. Leave us trees to climb in.

ECOLOGY IS NOT JUST TREES, ANIMALS AND RIVERS, IT IS ALSO HUNGER AND THE HOMELESS

We should all help our brothers and sisters who have been abandoned on the streets. Eliminate poverty.

We want you to understand that all excessive consumption affects developing countries most.

WE WANT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO BE RESPECTED ALL OVER THE WORLD

No child should be imprisoned or beaten, no child should die of hunger or from diseases that could easily be prevented. All children have a right to have parents.

WE WANT EVERY GIRL AND BOY IN THE WORLD TO GET AN EDUCATION FOR A BETTER START IN LIFE.

WE WANT TO SEE ILLITERACY WIPED OUT.

It is our future and we want to have a say in it. We want to be educated in such a way that we get the courage to speak our minds. We want a world without discrimination.

WE WANT VERY STRICT LAWS AGAINST DESTROYING NATURE

Anybody polluting the environment should have to pay large fines.

Stop producing materials that harm the ozone layer or it will be broken and the sun's rays will burn us. Stop global warming, reduce CO2 emissions. Cut the use of fossil fuels, use sun and wind power. Instead of drilling for more oil, use energy less wastefully.

WE WANT YOU TO STOP USING NUCLEAR POWER

End nuclear testing in our oceans and seas, we demand the removal of all nuclear power stations.

WE DON'T WANT OUR CITIES TO BE RUINED BY CARS

We don't want to be sick from exhaust fumes. We want you to make cars that don't pollute. Public transportation should be better, cheaper and more efficient than private cars. Make it easier for us all to use our bicycles.

WE DON'T WANT OUR WORLD TO DROWN IN RUBBISH.

NOBODY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO DUMP THEIR RUBBISH IN OTHER COUNTRIES.

Stop littering, make less waste. We don't need all the packaging materials.

WE WOULD LIKE ALL THINGS TO BE RECYCLED.

Make it easier for people to recycle their rubbish. Stop producing disposables.

PLEASE, LEADERS OF THE WORLD, GIVE US CLEAN DRINKING WATER.

Without water there is no life. Too many children are drinking clayish water from shallow wells, pipe borne water is still a luxury. Too many children spend hours walking a long way to find water.

WE FEAR THAT WHEN WE GROW UP THERE WILL BE NO FISH IN THE OCEAN.

We want you to stop oil spills in the oceans, to stop factories from releasing their sewage and waste into rivers and lakes. The sea cannot absorb poison without being harmed.

ANIMALS HAVE AS MUCH RIGHT TO LIVE ON THIS EARTH AS WE DO.

Protect endangered animals, stop buying products made from rare animals. People should be able to do without real fur coats, crocodile leather or jewelry from ivory. Ban animal testing for cosmetics, ban killing animals for sport.

WE WANT MORE DONE TO SAVE WHAT IS LEFT OF THE NATIVE FORESTS.

The rainforests are home to many people and animals. We want indigenous peoples to be able to live by their own rules. Don't cut down all the native trees because the birds need homes, just like all the children in the world.

WE ARE AFRAID OF BEING SWEEPED OFF THE FACE OF OUR COUNTRY BY THE APPROACHING DESERT.

Stop bush-burning and overgrazing that is killing our trees and huring our grassland vegetation. We want canals to be built alongside the main rivers to prevent flooding. Stop building large dams against people's wishes.

ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE IN PEACE.

The money spent on military armaments should be spent on saving the planet. Instead of making bombs, improve the standard of living in the world.

THE EARTH IS A SINGLE COUNTRY, AND ALL PEOPLE ARE ITS CITIZENS.

We have to share this planet, so don't be selfish. We want food to be shared so that everyone has enough. We want clean water and a home for all people. We are worried about pollution, war and children starving, while others don't appreciate the food they get. We are afraid that the world will soon belong only to the rich.

THIS EARTH IS MORE VALUABLE THAN ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD. WE WANT ALL COUNTRIES TO WORK TOGETHER TO PROTECT IT.

present who were not pleased that the young people on the evaluation panels were being encouraged to exercise their right to be heard.

At the end of the conference Vicky Maund put the proportion of adults who treated her with proper seriousness at about 80% - a pass-mark, as one of the



adults commented, but not the 100% that might have been expected. (At a meeting of the evaluators' panel after the conference, the figure was revised downwards to 66%.)

I imagine that the proportion had risen as the conference progressed. I heard several people say that often the most useful comments in workshops came from the evaluators, and also that they were glad that the presence of the young people obliged speakers to explain their terms and use a minimum of jargon.

The actual evaluations were direct and on the whole appreciative; they were useful as reminders if you had been to the session, and as indications of content if you had missed them.

There was a demand for clear, interesting, well-presented material, appreciation of the involvement of younger people in the presentations and an enthusiasm for participatory work.

Several of the evaluators expressed the intention of following up what they had learnt.

Most of them ended their evaluations appropriately enough with thanks to the speakers, but I heard one person objecting to this, on the grounds that it implied that the conference was being held for the benefit of the young people and not for the adult participants.

I did not understand why the conference could not be for everyone. However the main reason the young people had been invited was that they were needed for the contribution they could make.

For some adults this must have been a difficult idea to accept.

The presence of the assessment panel was a continual reminder that it should not be only the adults who decide what needs to be done in order to further children's rights.



At the final plenary session various proposals for further action were put forward. Professor Mary John, the conference organizer, immediately declared that she would be calling the assessment panel together once again to consider these proposals.

We do indeed need to act, but we must learn to listen first, and when we act we must act in co-operation.

Learning through Landscapes
Third Floor, Southside Offices, The Law Courts, Winchester, Hants.
tel: 0962-846258

Underground Power
9 Osmaston Road, Birkenhead, Merseyside L42 8PY

Free expression

Sarah Loufti describes the unsuccessful attempts made by her school to silence her from expressing her opinions

IN THE main hall everyone gathers. When the Headmaster strides in we all stand, not out of respect, but because we are told to stand.

"...And if you feel there is anything you would like to express, please do not fail to express them", the Head says.

I remember one assembly when our Deputy Head was taking the assembly. She started talking about the Gulf War.

"Pray for all our boys out there. Of course, if ever any country is in need, it's good to know our boys are always willing to give a hand to help them."

What? Like they gave a hand in Northern Ireland? Gunning down children on the streets. The helping hand they gave to Oman, Yemen, Malaya, India, Malawi, Tanzania and so on?

So I raised my hand in front of the whole year to mention what I was thinking.

At this I was leapt upon by my Head of Year who proceeded to silence me. In the end I didn't make my point.

I mentioned in a previous article (*Lib ED* No 19) about an article I wrote for the school magazine.

The article was about an issue at the time: the Birmingham Six, their wrongful imprisonment and the criminal justice system.

This was considered "far too controversial" to put in and when asked "Is then the magazine merely an advertisement for the school?" the Deputy head replied "Yes" (sic).

In a geography lesson we were learning about the 'third world' and our teacher decided she would make a few racist comments as she went along: "The reason black people are over-populated is because they have nothing else to do except have children." Once again I put my hand up to object and stated my point.

She sneered at me and on my school report she wrote, "Sarah is very intolerant of other people's views".

Her dismissal of my opinion was ignored.

Our CDT lesson was taken by the Head of Department because the regular teacher was away.

He started making sexist jokes and comments about women and CDT. After being shouted down by a number

of girls, he remarked, "Oh you can't take a joke".

My sister studied the American West in her history lessons during her GCSEs. She found that the lessons, text books and schoolwork were extremely bigoted and biased.

The history books told only of the white settlers' side of the story, leaving the Indians looking like 'bloodthirsty savages'.

In protest she complained and wrote an alternative essay. For this she had to go and apologise to the Head of History for "upsetting" her!!

The stories could go on forever, telling of censorship, sexism, racism by members of the staff and more censorship. The school uniform itself is a restriction of freedom for pupils to express ourselves.

So what does the headmaster really mean when he tells us to express our views?

I think what, perhaps, he means is that, yes we can say what we like, do what we like, wear what we like so long as they tell us it is OK. If not, we are breaking the school rules.



Circus-time: Woodcraft folk building a human pyramid

Folk for friendship and fun

The Woodcraft Folk is an organisation for young people of both sexes which began as a breakaway organisation of the Scouts in the 1920s.

It was set up as a reaction to the 1914-18 war and the militarism of the Scouts. Then it was assisted financially by the Co-op and has been linked to the Co-operative movement ever since.

Several years ago *Lib ED* carried an article on the Woodcraft Folk entitled 'The Green Costumed Co-op Kids' that took a harsh line and concentrated mostly on the hierarchical national organisation of the Folk.

Here we look at the workings of the Folk and re-evaluate the organisation from a broader point of view.

ORIGINALLY the Folk started in London and only really extended beyond there after the 1939-45 war when Woodcraft Folk leaders and young people moved around and set up new groups wherever they went.

This was the Folks first growth period. The second main one came in the seventies with the parallel growth of the Peace movement when it became dominated by middle-class lefties. Before that it seems to have had a strong communist party membership.

Activities

There are over 700 groups all over Great Britain including two in Northern Ireland. The largest concentration of groups, however, is in the South East of England where you find half of the groups.

The groups do many things. Typical evening activities may include craftwork, drama, environmental projects and lots and lots of non-competitive games. Camping and hiking are regular activities at weekends and holidays.

The groups exist within a national structure. A reasonably sized area such

as a county or large town, is called a District. Within that District will be some groups of Elfins (6-9 year olds) Pioneers (10-12 year olds), Venturers (13-15 year olds) and District Fellows (16-20 year olds).

Representatives of the groups, usually the adults -- but the more progressive groups involve the young people, come together to arrange camps, programmes of meetings and details such as how much to charge at meetings.

The Districts and Groups belong to Regions (The Midlands is one example) which sometimes have a paid Development Officer who works her/himself into the ground for the Folk.

There is also a very small National Office which convenes Planning and Policy making groups from the committee elected at National Annual Delegate Conference.

Most usefully the National Office produces and distributes *Woodcraft World*, a monthly newsletter that goes to all adult members.

Internationalism

The Woodcraft Folk has an internationalist philosophy and

organises exchanges with other countries.

Most are with European countries through the International Falcon Movement but there have also been exchanges with young people from Nicaragua, India, Palestine and the Western Sahara in recent years.

The Folk were exchanging with East European countries long before the Iron Curtain crumbled and when no other youth groups were going.

Equal Opportunities

A number of Equal Opportunity groups have set up within the Folk in the last few years.

These include Lesbian and Gay, Anti-sexist, Anti-racist, Men for Change in the Woodcraft Folk, and Disability groups. They come together under the Equal Opportunity Co-ordinating Group that was recognised by the Annual Delegate Conference of 1992.

Its function is to consult with the organisation in order to write policy along with the provision of practical information, to undertake training, and to feed out resource advice and information to local groups.

"Everyone notices the positive side of people, not the negative side"

Venturer

Woodcraft Folk speak for themselves...

You have a good laugh! Some of the meetings are a bit boring. You have more control than we did in the younger groups. We should have more outings! If we can afford it. Democracy? Yeah - I think it's all right. We need to change the name: problem is nobody can think of a better one: we've often discussed it. You tell people you go to Woodcraft Folk and they think you're carving things out of wood all night.

Venturer, Crown Hills Woodcraft Folk

I liked the dance that they did - you know, the ceilidh. I like Austen (a large leader) giving me rides on his shoulders. I like my friends...mmm...and I like all the other people. I don't like the noise and I don't like the boys.

I'm happy with the way the meetings are organised.

Elfin, Crown Hills

I don't know what I enjoy about it but I enjoy going anyway. SONGS -- I can't stand them. Sometimes it's been arranged for you and you have to go along with it, but I'm generally happy.

Pioneer, Crown Hills

I like going outside. And it's good because we meet our friends; and it's OK as well.

It's somewhere to go on Wednesday evenings, you meet your friends and it's fun!

Elfin, Crown Hills

I could tell you quite a lot of things I don't like about the Woodcraft Folk. We can't be silly, and I don't like getting on to serious subjects, and I don't like having to SING.

I don't think we have enough say in what goes on. They tell us to do things and we go off and do them.

It would be difficult to change things, I couldn't come along to those planning meetings.

Pioneer

I can pretend I'm young again. There's nothing at all I dislike, it's a wonderful organisation -- keeps me young in spirit.

You can always improve democracy. It's in the right direction -- it's made a good start.

Venturer leader

It's got a sense of equal opportunities,

fun, adventure, happiness and freedom for everybody. Democracy?... I think we could do better. We need to involve the children a bit more, listen to the children's ideas and work together more.

Elfin leader

Well, it's good because I go to a girls' school and can meet some boys.

Pioneer

In summer I like the camps.

Yeah...they're good.

...but I want to be a Venturer.

So do I.

We really want to be Ventureres.

Also I don't like some of the plans that the adults do...

Yeah...but next time we're doing our own. But we want to be Venturers and if they did it at twelve we would be.

We ought to be able to take control of meetings if we want to. We did once when there was something we did not like - but they got really mad with us. They got really mardy (Midlands word for bad tempered), so we just had to do it.



Collective catering

To stop that we should be able to plan our own things.

We're doing that next time.

We should be able to plan some meetings with the Venturers, rather than the Elfins.

Why do so many Pioneers want so much to become Venturers?

Because Venturers can do more



Morning has broken for two pioneers

things like plan their own programmes. Also they can go on the International Venturer Camp, and we want to go on it too. Also in some other groups they go up at twelve. This means that they could go on the camp and we could not because we'd still be blooming Pioneers. The Summer Camp will be really crap without the Venturers.

We met some people from around the Midlands - Well I met some people I really liked on one camp and saw them again. Some people you meet are a bit funny - and some are really nice.

various Pioneers

It's good. It's not sexist. People aren't embarrassed to join in silly games, and they don't have to have particular religious beliefs. It's really democratic. You have chances to go on camps and exchanges abroad.

What's bad? It's a bit 'cliquey' in this group, so it's a bit intimidating to younger Venturers.

They don't talk about issues much -- it's more of a youth club to some of them.

Only people over 16 have a say in the organisation through the District Fellows Conference.

Camps are really good - they're mixed and a chance to get to know people you wouldn't normally go around with. This group is mostly a group of friends -- which is not a good point.

Young people do have a say - if a member of a group wants something done then they can tell their leader who can represent their group at the Annual Delegate Conference. Young people under 16 should be able to go to represent their groups at the ADC.

I've enjoyed it all the 14 years I have been in it. Camps are really good. You

meet lots of people from abroad as well.

Venturer, Acocks Green group

You can be silly and stop thinking about exams and things. You go to some great places like Peace Festivals. It's better than any other youth organisation: it's non-sexist, non-militarist, no uniform, non-religious and not patriotic.

Bad things? Sometimes I come along and forget the things I should be doing.

In this group we decide what happens. The National organisation has District Fellow meetings - I am not sure how the under 16s are represented. I am quite happy with the organisation the way it is.

Venturer, Acocks Green group

I've been coming for ten years. It gives you the chance to meet new people. It's very friendly and a place where you can learn new skills and ideas.

There's nothing bad about it. We organise the group in pairs or small groups and do what we want.

I don't know much about the National Organisation. Now that I'm sixteen I can go to the District Fellows Conference and have more of a say. Younger people should have a say too -- older people can't say what younger people want.

National camps are good places to meet people from all over.

Venturer, Acocks Green group

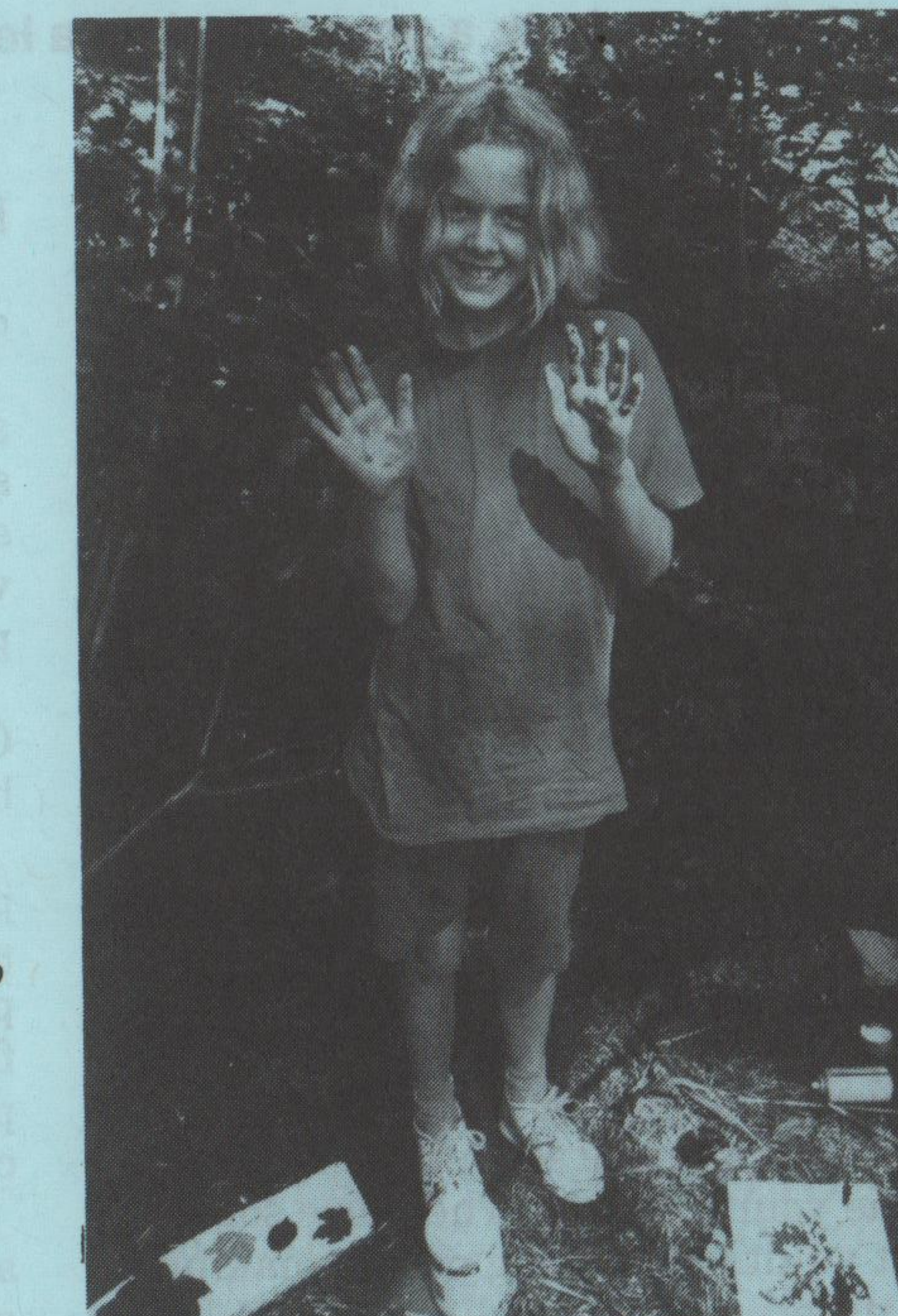
It's great. It's a bit disorganised at the moment because we're reorganising ourselves.

If someone was doing the organising for us it would be better organised, but it's good this way.

Venturer

"The folk has broadened its horizons but has become more middle class"

Olive Palser joined the Woodcraft Folk in 1933 as a 13 year old. When she married her husband, Ted, "he had to join too," she told us.



Painting by fingers

Olive: The Folk was completely different then. We wore horrible jerkins we made ourselves. My mother heard about Woodcraft through the Women's Guild. When I was 18 I became a Woodcraft Leader -- but the war was on. I was called up and someone else took over.

Our group expanded, and until last Christmas I've always run the Elfins. We've been camping almost every year and we used to go almost every week end from Easter to October in shorts!

Annual Delegate Conferences were held at camp. An ADC was held in Buxton during the war on my 21st birthday, we walked from Manchester to Buxton to be there.

Ted: The Folk was a cosy organisation: you knew everyone and some people resisted change.

Olive: The Folk isn't truly democratic because not all groups have delegates at the Annual Delegate Conference.

Ted: It's still a minority of Leaders who are active. We try to ensure that the young people are involved in the planning of the group. When our group had to move it was discussed by the young people as well. There are limitations, for instance if the kids want to camp and they can't get an adult to do it, then they can't.

Even the Elfins vote for what they want - like activities, games and so on.

The things we do with kids has expanded - we're having a talk on the environment tonight. Well we used to have talks, singing, dancing and craftwork. We didn't do badge work before: there's much more help for Leaders these days.

We had two Dutch children for our first International Camp. We travelled in old army trucks or co-op vans. All our children went on camps from when they were babies.

Ted: I went on the first delegation to Poland after the war in 1953, and we used to have a good relationship with the Polish organisation: the ZHP.

International work was done from the National Office.

Ted: I've been to Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Bulgaria, Poland and Austria. We have been a lot to International Falcon Movement meetings.

We always do central catering at International Camps. At the last one there were about 3000 from 25 countries.

Ted: The Folk has broadened its horizons but has become more middle class. In those days there wasn't much competition, less things to do. Kids and leaders were happy to go to camp every week end. It used to have a happy family feeling about it.

Thorny questions and some answers

We look at the thorny questions of working class participation, young people's rights and democracy in the Woodcraft Folk.

THE CONCEPT of democracy is very important to the Woodcraft Folk. It starts at group level with 'The Council Circle'.

At the beginning and end of most group nights and daily at camps the group will meet in a circle with the idea being that everyone has an equal say and the right to make suggestions and to criticise.

Adults work as a collective to prepare District plans and policy or group meetings. Nationally democracy finds its expression through the Annual Delegate Conference to which each group sends one voting member.

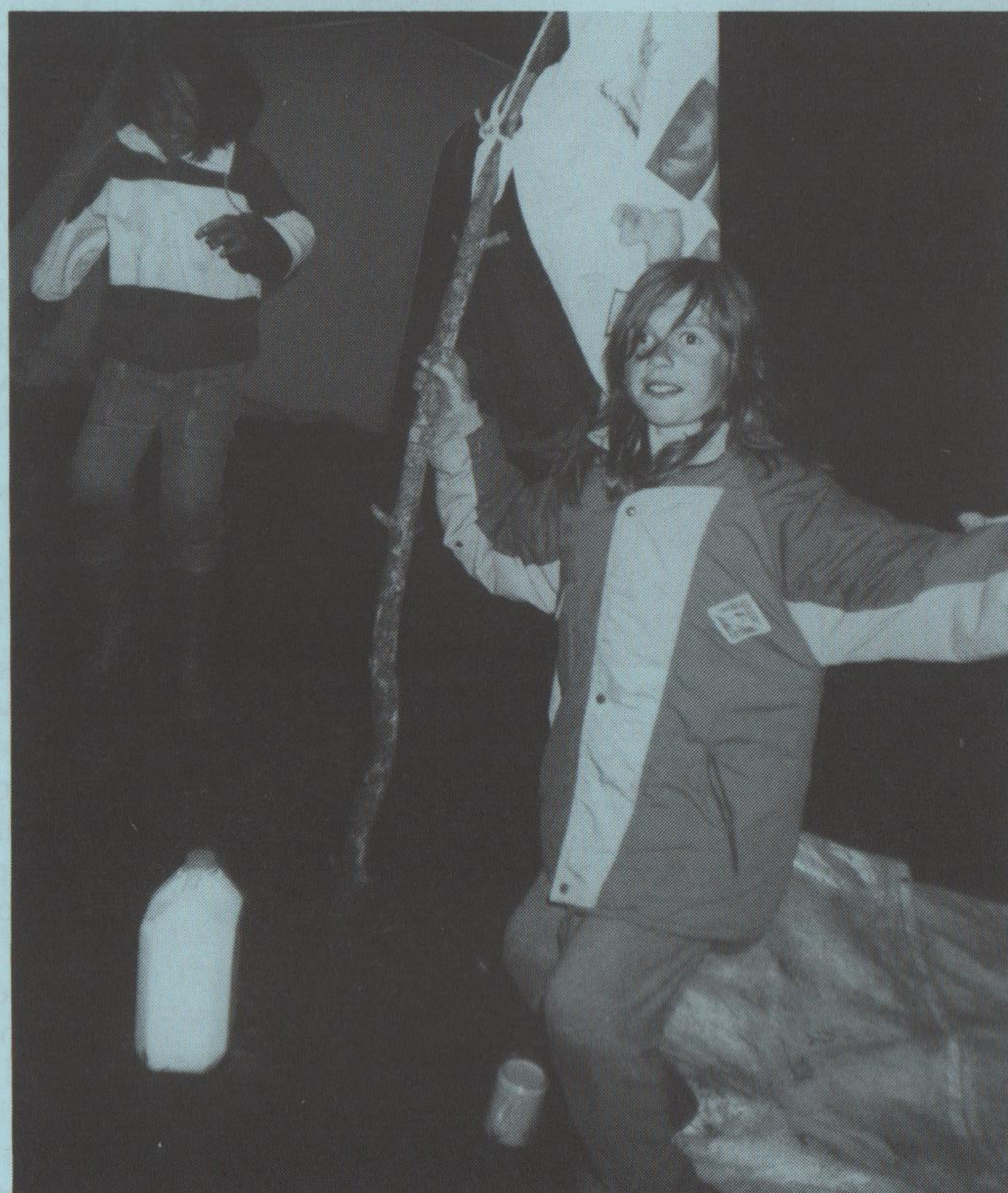
Recently there has been a move away from the macho Parliamentary style debate on issues to more workshop based conferences.

Young People's Rights

16-20 year olds (District Fellows) over the last few years have taken increasing responsibility and power within the organisation.

They have their own

conference as well as having four representatives on the National Council of 20 elected officers. There is a further



Dancing the night away at Woodcraft camp

minimum of four places for under twenty-fives on the National Council. The District Fellows have had to struggle hard to win the rights that they now have.

As yet there is no official representation for the other age groups.

The Strathclyde Project

The Strathclyde Project has been successful in attracting more working class participation in the Folk.

The project was set up in 1985 and worked initially through community groups including toddlers groups, the Trades Unions and tenants associations.

The work, which was funded largely by Strathclyde Council, involved introductory training sessions for local adults and finding new ways of working with people.

This has shown that given adequate funding and a serious intention to involve working class people, the Woodcraft Folk can pull itself out of its middle-class cutesy image, and become a wider organisation for change.

Doom, gloom but light too

Heather Parker is involved with the Woodcraft Folk as both a parent and as a leader. Here she sums up her feelings about the organisation.

I WOULD say that many group leaders in many groups do want to provide something different -- more freedom and a say in what goes on.

They are often committed to young people's liberation and rights to some extent, though they may not put it that way themselves. However many are not, and simply want to provide, or to impose, a different view of the world from that gained by young people from school and TV.

Some do not even aspire to these lofty aims.

The limitations of the Folk, as I see it, are the same ones that beset most of us who are parents, teachers or youth workers, namely lack of resources, money, time, energy, patience, people, space and so on.

The Woodcraft Folk has not the financial resources available to many other youth organisations and, as such,

relies on individuals, mostly untrained volunteers, who struggle from week to week to provide something.

The overview is often obscured or completely lost to even those of us committed to the liberation of young people amidst trying to ensure there are enough adults to satisfy insurance requirements, money to pay for the hall, activities to keep twenty young people interested, juice and biscuits too!

For most Folk leaders Woodcraft is not the main focus of their lives, so time and energy is strictly limited. Often we wonder, somewhat despairingly, what difference we can make in one and a half hours a week anyway.

But all is not gloom and doom. Woodcraft does seem to be enjoyable for the young people. There are some great adults and young people making a real difference to their lives. The 16-20 year olds are organising themselves and

having their say.

As to whether the Folk is libertarian or not, I'd say not.

There is very little general awareness of young people's liberation struggles, and most groups, districts and regions are run entirely by adults with some lip-service paid to young people having some say.

The structure of the National Organisation is hierarchical and bureaucratic.

The Folk does seem to have some problems attracting and retaining black and working class young people at present, although this does vary a lot from area to area and was not so in the past. It is dominated by 'lefty' middle class professionals.

However, it is certainly a welcome alternative to most of the other options available, particularly for the younger age group.

True Confessions

9.30 Boss Patten has just returned from confession. He is in a bad mood.

"I confessed everything. The way we've wrecked the economy, ground down the poor and helped out the rich; our disastrous energy, transport, housing and health policies; how we sold arms to Iraq and helped Pol Pot.

"And, of course, the complete balls up we have made of education. But when I asked him to absolve me he just laughed and made some remark about seeing me rot in Hell. I don't know what the Church is coming to. I blame all the crap about the meek inheriting the earth.

"Of course it's a mistranslation you know. What it really means is the children of the rich will inherit the earth which is obvious when you think about it. After all it does belong to their parents. Mind you that Jesus was never a real Catholic..."

The boss is always like this after confession, it's his own fault. He will insist on telling the truth whereas my motto is: what God doesn't know won't hurt him. Fortunately confession is the only time he does tell the truth so I suppose there's no harm done.

I tell him a joke from the latest issue of *Classroom War*, the anarchist rag:

"What have you got if you have fifty deputy heads up to their necks in pigshit?"

"I don't know", replies the boss.

"Not enough pigshit!"

He cheers up straight away.

We go on to look at the latest Exam Result League Tables. "What about all these schools at the bottom with no passes?" he asks.

"Oh, those are special schools", I reply.

"Special...special! Diabolical more like it", he shouts. "Close them down. It's a disgrace."

I'll try and explain the situation when he's calmed down.

10.30 Brief visit to the David Mellor City Technology College for Girls that was set up for him by one of his millionaire friends. I sit in on a sex education class.

The teacher tells the class all about safe sex and then the students divide into groups of three or four, each with their own blow-up Mellor doll and practice sucking its toes. Apparently this is completely safe if you don't mind athlete's foot.

12.00 Over lunch I go over a specimen paper for the new surprise exam we are going to spring on schools next year:

The Standard Higher Intelligence Test or SHIT as it is known in the Department.

This is intended to assist schools selecting their student entry and will incorporate a handy lifestyle section.

For example, question 17 reads, "How many houses do your parents own?"

You lose no marks for one, get five marks for two and ten for more than two.

And question 22 is useful too - "What colour are you?" This sort of exam paper breaks new ground. It does what the old 11-plus used to do but much more openly.

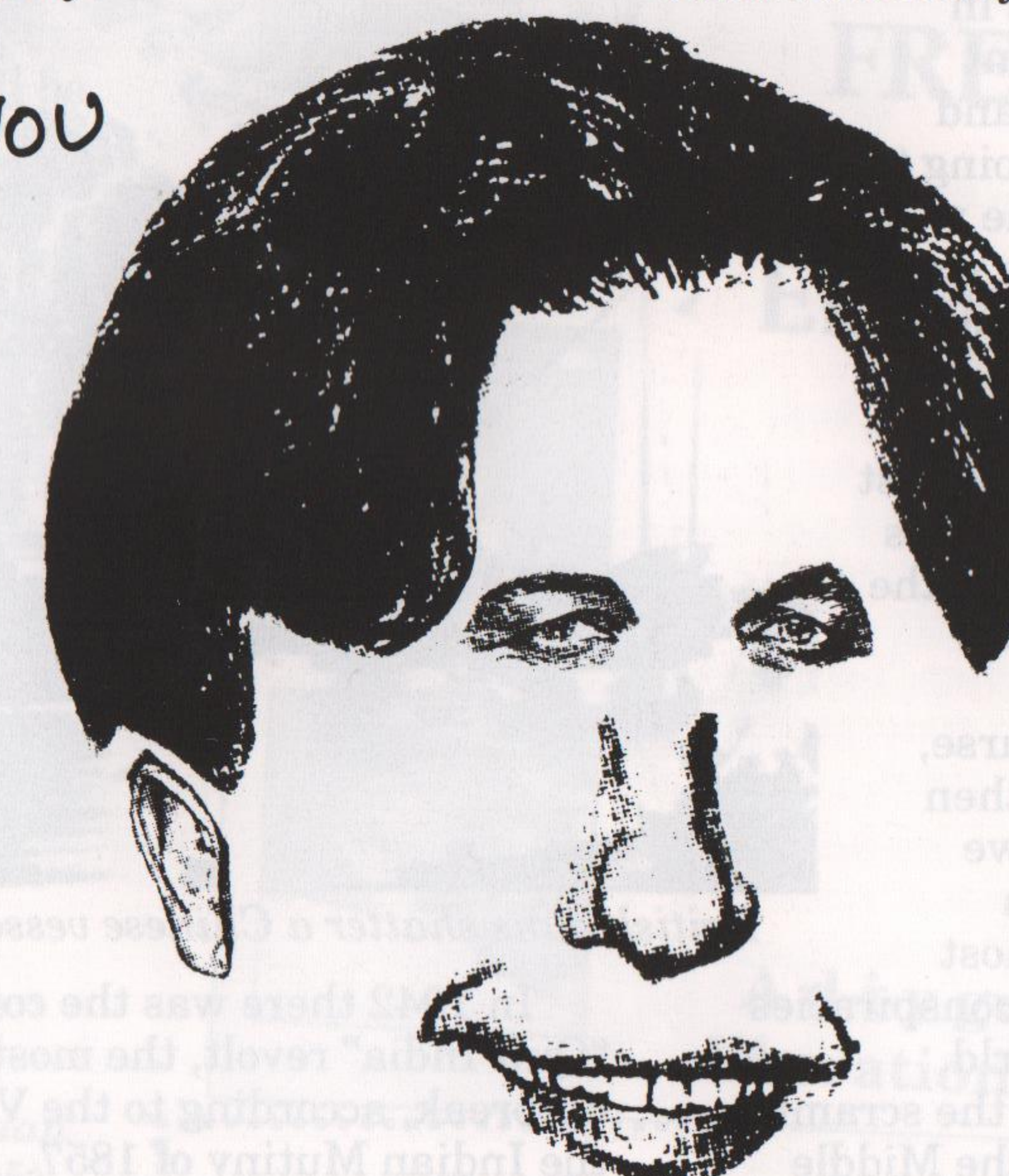
None of us would lament the passing of this particular species.

3.00 Attend a Government wank tank seminar on education. Three of the great intellects of contemporary Britain, Oliver Letwind, Ferdinand Mountebank and Roger Scrotum, give papers on MODERN CONSERVATISM AND EDUCATING THE THICKIES.

Letwind argues that parental income is a far better guide to educational achievement than IQ and that consequently this is what we should be testing.

Scrotum argues that working class children actually look thick so teachers

HAVE YOU
SEEN
THIS
MAN?



WANTED
FOR
QUESTIONING
ABOUT
EDUCATION
POLICIES.

I also have time to look at a report from our Genetics Department which is monitoring physical changes in the teaching profession since the 1988 Education Act.

They have identified the emergence of a number of distinct teacher species. There is the 'FUCK IT' species that moans all the time, does as little as possible and goes home early, the 'CAN'T STOP' species that runs around all the time but gets very little done, and the 'CAN DO' species which has actually developed a specially adapted tongue that can lock into the anus of the 'DEPUTY HEAD' species; itself very much an evolutionary dead end.

Most encouraging is the gradual disappearance of the 'BOLSHY' species with its characteristic cries of "I'M NOT DOING THAT", "DO IT YOUR BLOODY SELF", "WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?", "BOLLOCKS TO THAT", and not forgetting, "SHALL I STICK A BROOM UP MY ARSE AND SWEEP UP AS WELL".

should be trained to tell at a glance who will do well and who won't.

Most controversially, Montebank argues that black kids are just after our women.

They are all full of praise for the progress we are making in our covert reintroduction of selection. The Conservative restoration will finally be complete when the last comprehensive has been converted into a 1990s style secondary modern.

Next issue: We start the serialisation of Kenneth Baker's eagerly awaited memoirs, CONFESSIONS OF A TOTAL SHIT.

In the first extract we clear up the controversy surrounding the great man's birth. The rumours were true - his mother wasn't pregnant at all, she was just badly constipated.

Each copy of Baker's memoirs will have a velcro cover so it doesn't slip out of your hands.

Stories and Society

Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context a book edited by Dennis Butts published by MacMillan, £8.95

THE FIELD of children's literature is an important and relatively under developed area of literary criticism that is at last beginning to attract more of the attention it deserves.

This volume in the excellent MacMillan *Insights* series is a useful indication of this growing interest.

Altogether there are nine essays looking at genre (the school story, the adventure story and fantasy, at individual authors (Robert Cormier and Jan Needle) and particular books (*Little Women*, the Pooh stories and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*).

There is not space here to discuss all the various contributions, so let us concentrate on one: Jeffrey Richards, *The School Story*.

He brings out the extent to which the School Story has really been a celebration of the public school, a celebration devoured by a readership that in the main attended state schools.

As he puts it, these stories "for over fifty years dramatised and endorsed the public school values and virtues,

endorsing those characteristic which the British believe sustained their empire and justified their role as the world's policemen."

He discusses the novels that formed the genre: Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Dean Farrar's *Eric* and Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky and Co* before getting on to the phenomenal Frank Richards.

Frank Richards, the creator of Billy Bunter, between 1894 and 1961 wrote 65 million words under twenty-five pseudonyms about over a hundred different fictional public schools.

This incredible output of public school fiction by Frank Richards and others was, Jeffrey Richards suggests, an important factor in the survival of these institutions.

Only with Phil Redmond's Grange Hill TV series in 1977 does the school story really become democratised, a quite incredible situation that could only happen in Britain.

Depressingly, Redmond is reported as having decided to send his own kids to public school.

This is altogether an excellent collection with the only criticism being that it is too short -- it should have been twice the length.

Return of an author

Bogeymen

a children's novel by Jan Needle
Andre Deutsch, £8.99

AFTER a much too long absence from the field, Jan Needle has returned with a new anti-racist novel, *Bogeymen*.

This tells of how young Martin and his friends handle the arrival of a black family in their neighbourhood.

They are the first black people to move into the area and take over the old builders' yard that the kids used to regularly break into and play.

Twelve year old Martin comes face to face with the ignorance and prejudice of his friends.

One of them warns that they had better not trespass in the yard anymore or they'll end up cooked and eaten. Martin assumes this is a joke but then realises that his friends are in fact deadly serious.

The story goes on to show how Martin overcomes his own fears and his friends' prejudice.

Not one of Needle's best but still a useful novel. This is a welcome return of a fine writer.

Back Issues Offer

Now in its 25th year, *Lib ED* is the only chronicle of practical and theoretical developments in radical education -- if you've just caught up with us, catch up with what you've missed. Each back issue is yours for £1.30 (inc. p&p) (*Lib EDs* 7 and 9 to 14 are £1 and 17/18 is £2) but for only £10 you can have the complete set of back issues in print. At present that's Volume 2, numbers 7 and 9 to 20. We can also supply photocopies of articles published in all out-of-print issues of *Libertarian Teacher/Education/Lib ED*. Please send an sae for full details. (*Overseas friends, please send an additional £4 to cover higher postage*)

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Dead Poet

Philip Larkin's poetry has been studied at 'A'-level and in university departments of English for many years. Now one of his poems, *Cut Grass*, appears in the anthology of English literature to be studied by all 14-year-olds in Britain's schools. Perhaps everybody should be reminded of what this man was like.

*Prison for strikers
Bring back the cat
Kick out the niggers -
How about that?*



*I want to find them fawning,
to clean my car and boots.*

THE AUTHOR of this little piece of reactionary racist doggerel was none other than Philip Larkin, variously eulogised both before and since his death as "one of the best loved" poets in the English-speaking world, "a man of genius", "the unofficial Laureate" and the modern poet most "unfeignedly enjoyed".

Indeed a veritable cottage industry has developed to celebrate and interpret the great man to an admiring public, a substantial proportion of whom are school students making their first serious encounter with poetry.

Now we find out that this man, "the spokesman for England" as one critic has described him, was in fact a racist, sexist reactionary bigot.

The evidence from his *Selected Letters* (Faber and Faber £20) is conclusive, despite the efforts of some of his admirers to suggest that Larkin's 'lapses' were only jokes in bad taste.

While the verse above (apparently from a song he wrote, 'How to Win the Next Election') was obviously intended for the entertainment of a select group of cronies with similar prejudices, nevertheless the sentiments are pretty specific.

Moreover on other occasions Larkin could be much more brutal and to the point, for example when he confessed to Robert Conquest, the eminent academic, that he had stopped going to Test matches because there were "too many fucking niggers about".

There is a later letter also about cricket where he complains of "the black scum kicking up a din on the boundary - a squad of South African police would have sorted them out to my satisfaction."

It is just not possible to explain these sort of remarks away.

Similarly with regard to his views about the working class, once again the Bard of the English middle class put his feelings into verse:

*I want to see them starving,
The so-called working class,
Their wages weekly halving,
Their women stewing grass.*

*When I drive out each morning,
In one of my new suits,*

As the *Letters* make clear, his hatred of the working class was directed at two specific targets, trade unionists and working class university students.

The unions were threatening to bring the social order crashing down in the 1970s and early 1980s, a threat that Larkin took very personally.

Working class students, the children of the 'striking classes' were, as far as he was concerned, responsible for the student revolt of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

He looked first to Enoch Powell and then to Margaret Thatcher as saviour.

It is this threat to the social order that provides the key to understanding Larkin's bigotry. While always a conservative with a small 'c', nostalgic for an ordered, hierarchical society, the social tensions and conflicts that began to grip Britain in the late 1960s transformed him into an altogether vicious reactionary, a man whose bigotry was only equalled by his self-pity.

His jazz journalism (*All That Jazz* Faber and Faber £8.95) provides the clearest view of this transformation.

Larkin was, since his youth, a jazz fanatic, a devotee of Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington and Sidney Bechet among others.

How does this square with his racism? Well, his admiration was always compromised by his belief in their 'childlike beauty' but more important is his detestation of modern jazz.

While he loved the jazz that was

played by subservient black musicians for a white audience, he absolutely hated the modern jazz played by assertive black musicians. For example, he denounced John Coltrane as "...the musical equivalent of Mr Stokely Carmichael!".

"From using music to entertain the white man", Larkin complained, "the Negro had moved to hating him with it".

Clearly it was the threat that black power, student revolt, working class unrest and the women's movement posed to his little middle class world that turned him from a conservative nostalgic for an idealised past into a foul reactionary.

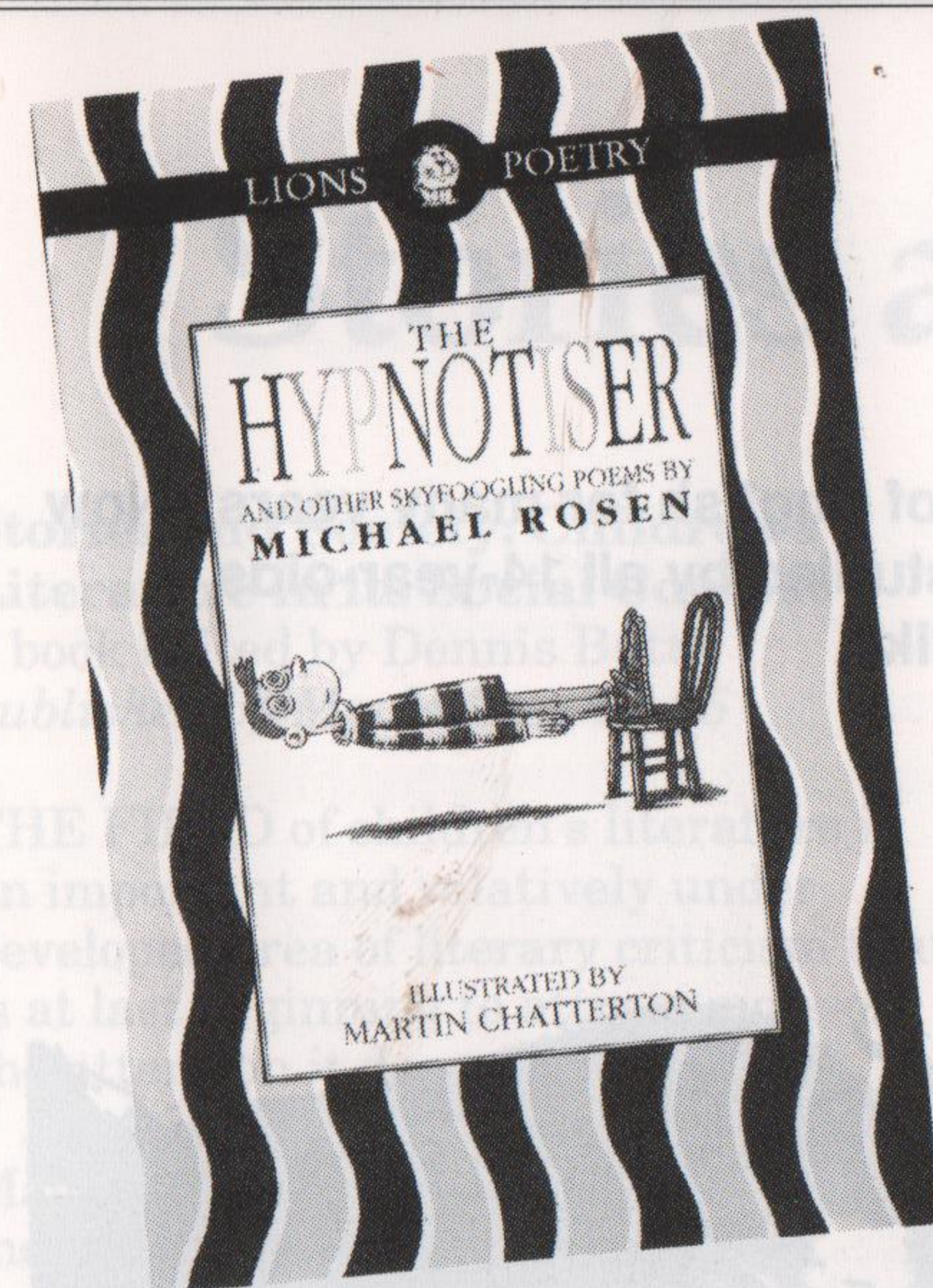
Where does this leave the Larkin industry? The revision of this minor poet's inflated reputation is already overdue but this will not really address the problem.

Larkin is principally celebrated for his middle class Englishness, ("there is a well-known photo of Larkin sitting next to a roadside sign bearing the word England and the pose seems exactly to typify him", according to one critic) and it is this that we have to address.

The uncomfortable fact is that the racist, reactionary opinions that he felt free to express in private are very much an integral part of this Englishness, the other side of nostalgia.

The two are bound up together so that the assault on Larkin has to be broadened, expanded into the 'English' tradition that he exemplified and that sustained him.

Our concern must be less with the rather pathetic figure of Larkin and more with the racism and hatred of the working class inherent in English middle class culture.



Two views of two volumes

The Hypnotiser and other skyfoogling poems
poems by Michael Rosen
Lions, Illus, pp175, £3.50

Song of the City
poems by Gareth Owen.
Lions, Illus, pp94

I TRIED *The Hypnotiser* on an eleven year old but she reacted in much the same way as I did when I was handed de la Mare's *Peacock Pie* at a similar age. The comparison is not so silly -- both these books have in common recognisable formal layouts of rhyme and metre.

Well, my informant enjoyed a few of Rosen's but was unshakably convinced that some of them were not poetry.

Were this reviewer still to be a class teacher he would produce these poems in ones or twos to entertain and stimulate the group and get them talking. There are many gems in both volumes.

The best books for children are too good to be restricted to them. There are poems by both the writers that adults will read and enjoy and share with kids. I confess I've skipped some of them just as in my complete Yeats. You don't read 270 pages of poems at a sitting. Browse them. Enjoy. Share the sounds with the kids when they want them.

I THINK most of the Michael Rosen one is really rubbish. They are not poetry and don't say very much. I liked a couple of them but they are mostly boring. I do not think they would have been published if they weren't by Michael Rosen who has written some good ones in the past.

Some of the Gareth Owen's ones are all right and better written.

Year 6 person's review

Bart and Lisa call the toons

The Simpsons
A cartoon series on Sky TV

THERE is so much wrong with television but once in a while you see something that goes some way to justifying all those wasted hours of mindless viewing.

There's even more wrong with Sky Television but that is where you can find *The Simpsons*. It's basically a half-hour cartoon series about an American working class family.

In its depiction of the life of Homer (father), Marge (mother), Bart (son), Lisa (daughter) and Maggie (baby daughter) it tackles the issues of contemporary America and life in the 1990s. It is a description of the American dream and of the 'underdogs' and their attempts to achieve success.

It illustrates the essential unattainability of the dream to most of contemporary America but especially to the 'lower classes' and those who refuse to lose their integrity and warmth.

The show reflects the Simpsons in everybody. Everyone can respond to the characters, each of whom embody different aspects of the whole.

Homer is self-indulgent and self-centred, Bart is a cunning and manipulative street-wise kid, Marge symbolises maternal and instinctual warmth and integrity, Lisa has aesthetic and intellectual integrity and Maggie embodies natural innocence and common sense.

In each episode different subjects are tackled with great humour and intelligence and conclusions reached which are positive and politically aware.

Continually in the series the Simpsons are faced with situations which throw up questions for the viewer: role models, gender roles, prejudice, violence, conformity, small-town morality and so on.

The episodes allow us to consider issues on a personal and social level. Each character whilst symbolising certain things also reflects capacities to be otherwise and to act in ways which are unexpected and challenging.

Education is a central theme in *The Simpsons*, both inside and outside the state system. The State's ability to educate Bart and Lisa is constantly criticised and shown up for its failings.

Bart is an outsider, an individualist who refuses (or fails) to conform. He is a creative and imaginative child of the 90s who knows how to play the system (but sometimes gets caught).

He is lazy and disruptive and the school's big problem - a problem they eventually try to solve by trying to exile Bart via the school's foreign exchange programme.

Lisa, by comparison is a star pupil. But she only conforms within her own boundaries and most of her intellectual demands are not met by the school system.

Her creative freedom is a danger to the school, hence her inability to introduce free-style jazz to the school band, and the fact that the only teacher she positively responds to is a supply teacher whose own style of teaching is, in its entertaining and non-authoritarian manner, itself a threat to the system.

One episode in particular illustrates the relationship between Bart, Lisa and the school. In this, a school computer system is used to predict future careers. Bart is told he will become a policeman and Lisa that she will become a housewife.

Bart reacts to this by assuming an authoritarian and aggressive male role and is encouraged by the school to act this way. Indeed he is made into a school hall monitor to practice his 'skills'.

Lisa's reaction to this prejudice and sexism is to become a delinquent engaged in total rebellion, similar to Bart's normal role. This is illustrated by her going to the toilets with the 'smoking girls' and then saving her cigarette so she can smoke it in the classroom.

Lisa eventually brings the whole school to a state of collapse by stealing all the teachers' answer books -- they can't teach and assess if they don't know the answers!

Bart then leads the investigation and search for the books and in the presence of the headmaster finds the books in Lisa's locker.

Bart then openly admits that he had stolen the books, thus in some way restoring things to a natural state which had been threatened by the computer prediction and its inherent unfairness.

Maybe I've over-interpreted the programme, maybe it's just simple entertainment but having watched many episodes and tried to understand its appeal, I can't help reaching the conclusion that it isn't just simple entertainment.

It's not worth buying a telly for and definitely not worth getting Sky TV for but if you get the chance then watch it and see what you think. It's better than the Turtles.

J Attwood and A Sinclair

Major Marxist mauls Major

Education and the Social Order 1940 - 1990

a book by Brian Simon
Lawrence and Wishart, £39.95

What Future for Education?

a book by Brian Simon
Lawrence and Wishart £8.99

Rethinking Radical Education:

Essays in Honour of Brian Simon
a book edited by Ali Rattansi and David Reeder
Lawrence and Wishart £12.99

BRIAN SIMON is one of the most important educationalists in Britain since the War, a major Marxist historian standing comfortably alongside the likes of Edward Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Victor Kiernan and Rodney Hilton and a staunch critic and opponent of the Tories and all their works.

These three volumes provide a useful introduction to the man and his contribution to the debate about education.

First, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* is the fourth volume of his marvellous history of education in England and Wales since 1780.

This new volume focuses on the genesis of the Butler Education Act of 1944, the educational performance of the 1945-51 Labour Government (some progress was made but Labour refused to challenge the social order), the expansion of higher education, the comprehensive revolution, the Black Paper backlash and lastly the Thatcherite counter-revolution implemented by the odious Kenneth Baker.

While the connection between educational reform, the labour movement and socialism that informs the earlier volumes has faded, nevertheless Simon still steadfastly relates education to the social order, emphasising the tremendous importance of the changeover to comprehensive schools, a revolution in which he himself played a not insignificant part.

This is certainly not a starry-eyed account, acknowledging as it does the fact that many comprehensive schools were 'comprehensive' in name only.

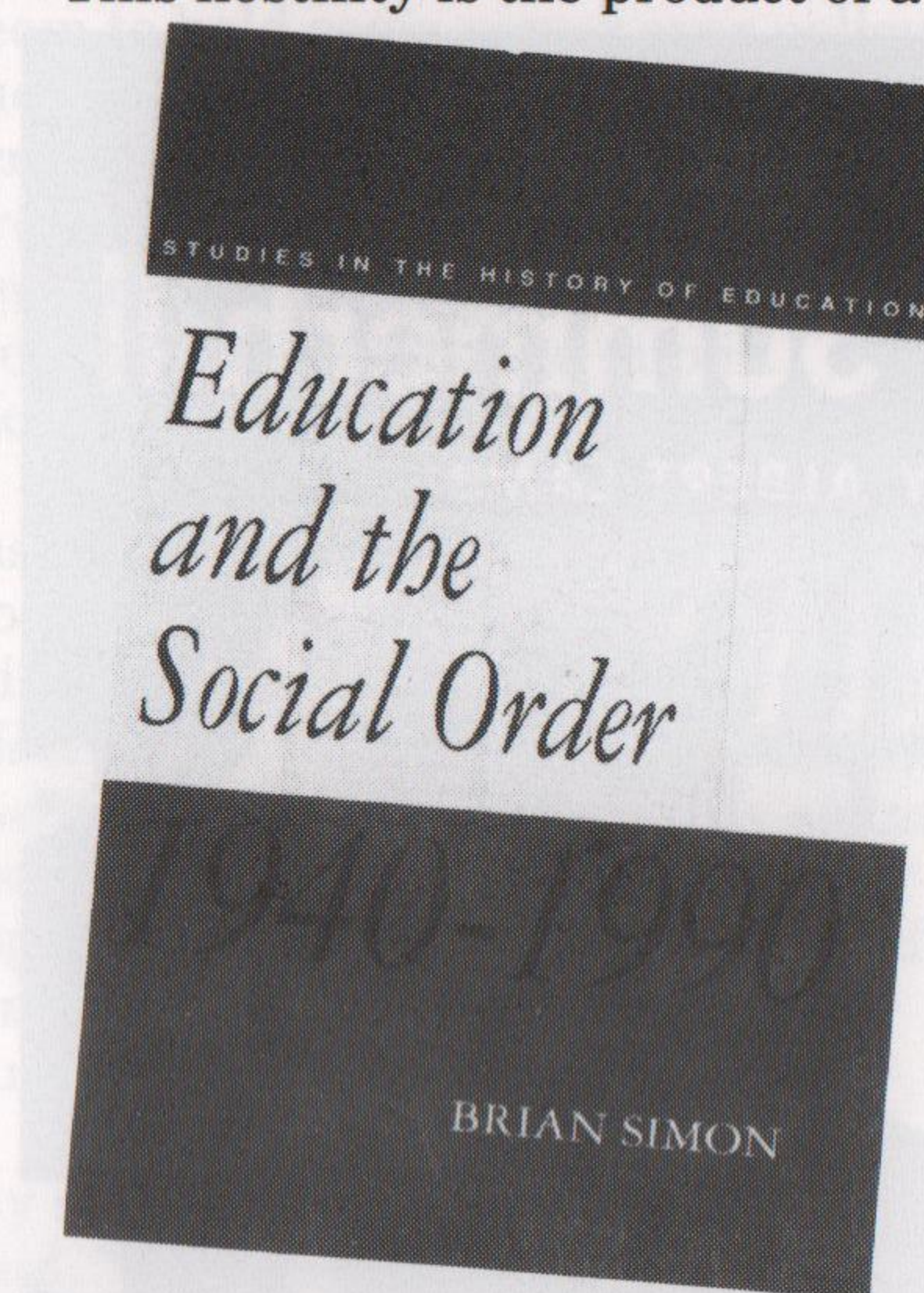
Nevertheless the importance of comprehensivisation is dramatically demonstrated by the ferocity of the backlash against it.

Simon describes the role of the notorious Black Papers in rallying and organising the opposition but also comments on the more surprising hostility from some supposedly more liberal quarters.

He cites a particularly disgraceful attack by Jill Tweedie that appeared in the *Guardian* as early as December 1974.

The *Guardian* does of course still play this role with the appalling Melanie Philips among others regularly attacking progressive education and teachers, on one particular occasion actually singling out one individual by name.

This hostility is the product of a fear



that *Guardian* journalists' nice kids will be forced by comprehensivisation to mix with rough kids and the subsequent guilt at sending them to public school.

Clearly the backlash against comprehensive schools has nothing to do with standards but everything to do with maintaining the social order that they appear to undermine.

The volume ends with everything up in the air. The Tory counter-attack was finally mounted by Kenneth Baker:

The 1988 Education Act, driven through parliament by a Conservative majority, certainly created a new situation. It altered the context in which the struggles of the future will take place as well as creating new systems through education, of social control.

Unlike any other country in Europe, the entire child population (always excepting those in independent schools) is to be subject to assessment at the ages of seven, eleven, fourteen and sixteen -- as first proposed by Rhodes Boyson and the Black Papers of 1975, following the student upsurge of the late 1960s. All are to be assessed on a ten point scale. Each in future is "to know their place". Such at least is the present.

But no Act of Parliament can legislate human aspirations. Struggles over education have taken place increasingly for over 200 years. One thing is certain -- more will continue

into the future.

Of course, since these words were written the situation has deteriorated even further with the Major Government determined to force schools to opt out of local authority control as a way of re-introducing selection.

The man charged with this is the pious John Patten, an even bigger shit than Kenneth Baker (something many people believed impossible).

This brings us to *What Future for Education?*, a selection of Simon's most recent contributions on progressive education and the Tories.

Here he writes absolutely devastatingly about opting out and the City Technology Colleges, labelling these initiatives quite bluntly as, "...bribery and corruption".

He goes out to identify the central drive of Tory policy as involving a return to selection, ensuring the provision of good schools for middle class parents and consigning working class kids to the less successful schools which will be trapped in an educational 'Catch 22', a spiral of underfunding, neglect, decline and deterioration.

This reflects the Tories' success in widening the gap between rich and poor, in polarising British society.

Of course this counter-revolution will meet growing opposition, opposition that will be strengthened by the Major Government's quite staggering incompetence, dishonesty and corruption.

There can seldom have been a government whose members are so openly derided as ignorant buffoons, incapable of getting anything right but still capable of the most self-righteous viciousness.

It is becoming clear that Major's position is so weak that he can be beaten and one suspects that his days are numbered.

Which brings us to *Rethinking Radical Education*, a volume of essays presumably intended as part of the opposition to the Tories.

Inevitably this is an uneven collection with too many of the authors guilty of a mealy-mouthed academicism. Most of the contributions have every appearance of being curriculum vitae exercises, destined to fill out MA reading lists, rather than making any serious contribution to the struggle.

There is too much in-house academic debate and not enough of relevance to teachers and parents concerned about what the Tories intend doing to their children.

This is a shame because the authors do address issues of gender and ethnicity which has been a gap in Simon's work. A missed opportunity.

Pick up this Penguin

The New Summerhill
a book edited by Albert Lamb
Penguin, £7.99

I READ *Summerhill* when I was twelve and remember wondering why my school and my family weren't like that. I remember thinking how wonderful it would be to go to Summerhill instead of the traditional grammar school I did go to.

I also remember thinking that I shouldn't be reading it.

At that time those ideas were so strange, attractive and forbidden that I couldn't quite believe that Summerhill existed.

Eighteen years on, having read about it, visited it, talked about it and even written about it, Summerhill still retains its attraction.

Perhaps my thoughts about it are less romantic, more realistic and my comments more critical but I still hold Summerhill in high regard.

Consequently, I welcome Albert Lamb's new edition of *Summerhill*. In the first section he has combined material from Neill's many writings into a readable text dealing with issues which Summerhill has been addressing over the years.

In the second, Neill gives his own life story. Throughout I was reminded of my feelings when I first read *Summerhill*. Neill was speaking to me, addressing things which neither my family nor school could understand or accept.

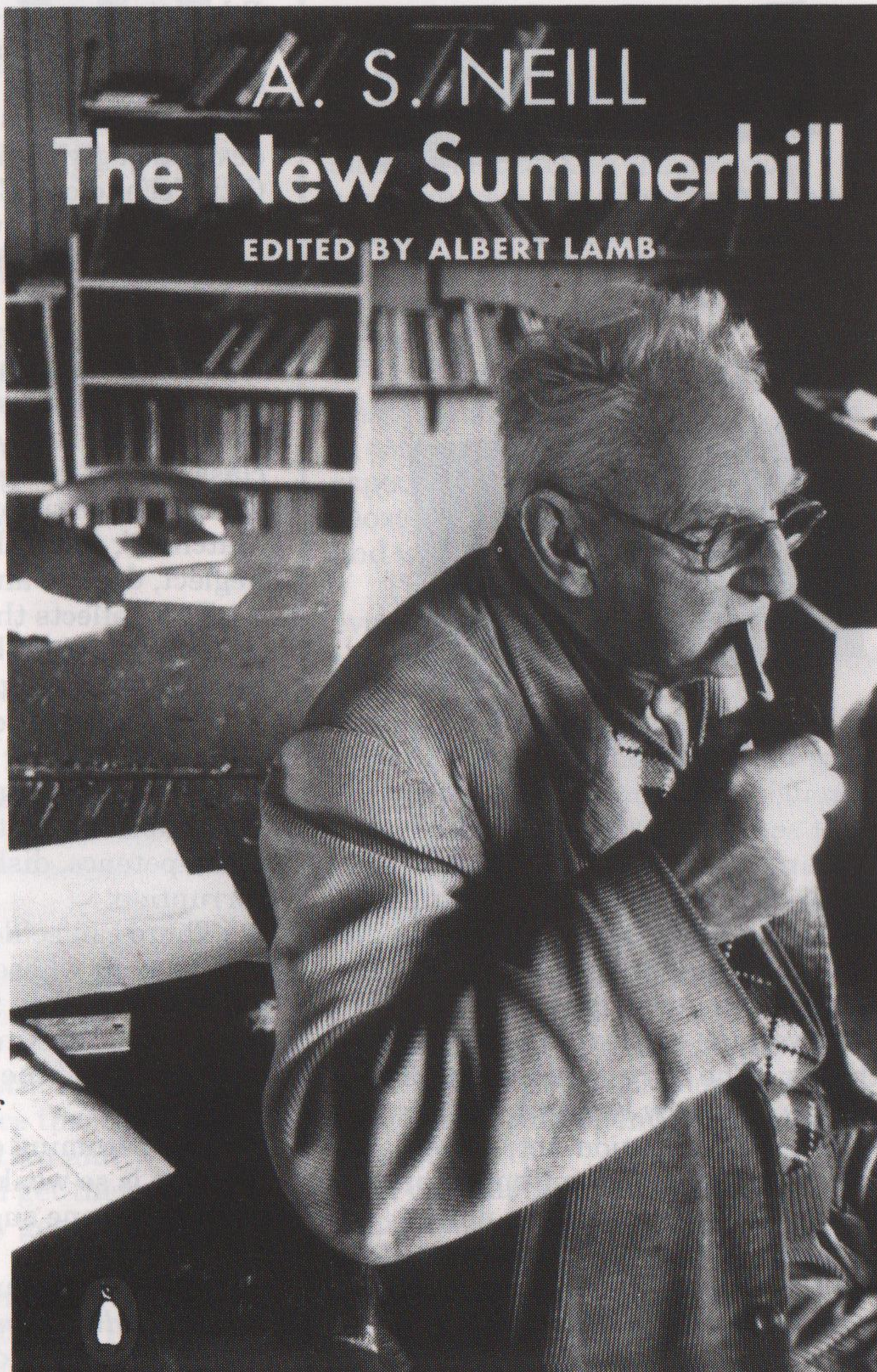
It is a credit to Albert Lamb that his editing has again allowed Neill to speak so well.

In his introduction, Mr Lamb says he chose not to change Neill's sometimes dubious language and that Neill would have been shocked at the charge of prejudice.

But Neill was often dubious in his

use of language and displayed clear prejudice. Witness: "Heterosexual play in childhood is the royal road" (p85).

While not wanting to sanitise the text, (I have no intention or desire to protect Neill from the charges of prejudice), I question Mr Lamb's decision to include such statements. I



am not sure that they will be taken as examples of Neill's prejudice rather than gospel truth.

The *New* in the title obviously refers to the book *Summerhill* not to the school.

This is a new edition of Neill's writings, not new material about Summerhill itself.

Personally I would have liked new material, to find out what the experience of Summerhill is now. But that is to criticise for omission of material which was outside to remit of the book.

Perhaps Mr Lamb would consider bringing *Summerhill* into the nineties.

Skippa dee doo dah

Skipping Stones
a multicultural children's quarterly
PO Box 3939, Eugene, OR97403, USA

SKIPPING Stones is a magazine aimed at children all over the world from the ages of ten to 14. Inside are poems and stories written by children from different countries, for example Mexico, Puerto Rico and Asia.

Most of the contributions, however, come from American children, many of them from minority cultures. This particular issue features women of many ages and places.

I liked some of the poems being in the language they were written in and English. Many of the stories were a bit young for me and would be preferred by younger children, but I liked some.

There are some interesting facts, for example "Women grow more than half of all food produced, and in Africa up to 75%. If the rate of pay for women increased at its current rate, it will take until the year 3000 for men and women to earn equal pay."

The magazine made me realise that the roles of women and girls in poorer countries are harder than in Britain.

The magazine could go in for more detail about some things. I don't like the poems about love and peace because they are too smoochy for me, but I like most of the rest.

I think that this would be very good for schools to buy for their library.

Bonnie Hill (13)

Green Watch

Battle for the Badgers
Sad Song of the Whale
Gorrilla Mountain
Spirit of the Condor
Four novels by Anthony Masters
Hippo Books, £1.95 each

THESE four volumes introduce us to Green Watch, a small group of animal rights activists made up of one adult, Seb, his kids, Flower and Brian, and their cousin Tim, who get involved in helping protect badgers in England, whales in the South Atlantic, gorillas in Rwanda and condors in California.

The wildlife protection dimension of the stories is successfully integrated with a conventional adventure / thriller structure. While the novels are hardly classics, they are all competently written, have plenty of excitement and make a welcome change.

One criticism: rather than show the system as the threat to all animal life, human included, the villains are maverick operators. This is a failure of nerve but the Green Watch books are at least a step in the right direction.

Talk minus Action = Zero

Dear Lib ED

What a delightful treat it was for me when I found your magazine (#20) yesterday in one of the local radical bookstores. "Turin Shroud Mystery Solved", was priceless and Doug Holly's apostatic confession was brave.

Two days ago I had just finished reading *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!* after previously reading *Summerhill* and *Summerhill: For And Against*.

I was beginning to wonder whether the place had folded due to lack of money, interest or Margaret Thatcher. It was an extremely demoralising thought.

In fact, however, I felt so energised after find out that Summerhill is quite alive, even if under a massive attack, that I went down to the Hotel Vancouver where our Conservative PM was hosting a \$300-a-plate dinner and joined the mob waiting for him.

He got inside just ahead of us but we caused enough of a scene for a few hours to bring the cops out in force and the local and national TV.

Anyhow, it seems strangely 'coincidental' that a very negative documentary on Summerhill should be broadcast simultaneously with a school policy change toward religious fundamentalism and a sort of neo-feudalism.

It reminds me of the Kuwaiti girl

(the one that later proved to be the Kuwaiti Ambassador's daughter) who testified before the US Senate claiming incubators stolen and dead babies littering the hospital floors. Good for hysteria, but patently false.

Lots of talk in the US government for 'family values' and 'nationalized testing' in the school system, but so far these diversions have been held at bay.

However, the religious fanatics seem to hold some power over policy there due to their daily assault on the screen and radio. God and the Devil are still taboo political subjects in this country and I suspect that they just wouldn't wash with the public.

When I forget about ideologies and just listen to people in general talking about the abyss into which we are all sliding, I prefer to avoid those persons - like I used to be - that say, "Oh ain't the world awful?" I've already spent too many years of my own life energy digging the trench, marching in and waiting for my corporate master to pull the trigger.

These days I carry, as the devil on my shoulder, this graffiti I saw that said, "Talk minus action = zero".

Most sincerely yours
Randall M Tillotson
Canada

Where there's a will

Dear Lib ED

I have just read the book published by you, *Free School: The White Lion Experience*.

The school closed in 1990 and according to an article in *The Guardian*, 10th April 1990, "the plan was to collect any remaining cash in a trust fund so that if anyone wants to start another free school they can apply to it for help".

Islington Council offered £30,000. Last year I made thorough but unsuccessful enquiries in Islington about whether there was any possibility of White Lion being re-opened with the help of the trust fund.

Although I was not expecting to die, I was making my will at the time and I would happily have made a White Lion successor my sole beneficiary.

I have still not made a will but I have often wondered, if I could locate the elusive trust fund, whether I could actively help in re-opening the school. I feel it would need to be a fee-paying school, though working in every other way as the original White Lion School.

I am retired and cannot give

financial help (until I die!), but my varied experience suggests that I could probably, by detailed canvassing, get added financial help both directly and from parental fees.

I often pass White Lion School. It is still empty and still bears its name. Externally it appears in good condition, though because of the fire, its inside would require much attention.

I hope I can find other idealists with whom to discuss what I have in mind.

Since retiring I have had a varied experience of voluntary work with children, in and out of schools, and if we could get White Lion School going again I would happily give my services free (as well as leaving my all to them when I die).

Alternatively, if there is another free school still alive in London, I would be glad to give any possible voluntary help.

All good wishes to Lib ED

Sincerely
Ernest Laban
59a Lower Clapton Road
Hackney
London E5

How long can you last in the state system?

Dear Editor

We were very interested in Adrian Parr's letter, Winter '92 edition. He has found out very early what it has taken us a long time to find out -- that true believers and practitioners of radical education cannot last for long in the state system.

Those who are in there pontificating about radical education quite obviously do not practice it otherwise they too would be sacked or thrown out.

As to his question about PGCE courses, there are obviously differing shades but in the end all aim to produce teachers in the same sort of mould.

That isn't to say there's not a place for radicals trying to reform the education system but we must be clear of the limitations of this.

Fraternally
Tony Boggust and Nichola Ashman

New school news

Dear Lib ED

I am writing on behalf of the Calderdale Small School Collective, a group of parents, teachers and others who are aiming to establish a small school in the Calderdale area by the end of the year.

We are in the process of becoming registered as an Industrial and Provident Society, a status which will give us access to charitable funding without being subject to the Charities Commission regulations.

The fee for registration is £750, a sum of money beyond our means at present. We also need a further £950 to buy a computer and word processor with a print-out facility. This will enable us to run our affairs much more efficiently and remove the present necessity to rely upon sympathetic friends for the use of their computers.

I would like to appeal to anyone who may have the financial means to help us come closer to realising our project.

Yours
Jill Penny
c/o Calderdale Small School Collective
3 Middle Nook
Old Town
Hebden Bridge HX7 8TL
Tel: 0422 844999

We're always delighted to get your letters. Please send them to us at: Lib ED, Phoenix House, 170 Wells Road, Bristol, BS4 2AG.