

## Groups and Resources

**Lib ED contacts**  
tel: 0117 977 8453  
e-mail: editors@libed.demon.co.uk

**National Union of Students**  
461 Holloway Road, London, N7  
0171 272 8900

**Letterbox Library**  
Unit 2D, Leroy House, 436 Essex Road,  
London, N1 3QP  
0171 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  
0181 672 6031  
*(A kind of non-sexist, non-militarist scouts and brownies)*

**Parent Network**  
Room 2, Winchester House, Kennington Park, 11 Cranmer Road, London SW9 6EJ  
*(Parent-Link is for all parents which offers practical new ways of dealing with the ups and downs of family life)*

**Education Otherwise**  
PO Box 7420 London, N9 9SG  
*(For everyone who practices or supports the right of children to learn without schooling)*

**Home Education Advisory Service**  
PO Box 98, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AN  
e-mail: 100752.1061@compuserve.com  
*(Practical help and support)*

**Campaign Against Military Research On Campus (CAMROC)**  
c/o Student CND, 162 Holloway Road, London, N7  
0171 607 3616  
e-mail: ycnd@gn.apc.org

**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)*

**Feminist Library**  
5/50 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1  
0171 928 7789

**End Physical Punishment of Children (EPOCH)**  
77 Holloway Road, London, N7  
0171 700 0627  
*(A national organisation which aims to end physical punishment of children by parents and other carers)*

**A K Distribution**  
33 Tower Street, Edinburgh, EH6 7BN  
0131 555 5165  
*(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, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0NS

**Education Workers Network**  
PO Box 110, Liverpool, L69 8DP  
*(Anarcho-syndicalist organisation for education workers)*

**Summerhill School**  
Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY

**Sands School**  
48 East Street, Ashburton, Devon, TQ13 7AX  
0136 45 3666

**Travellers' School**  
PO Box 36, Grantham, Lincs., NG31 6EZ  
01426 218424 (co-ordinator's pager)

**Underground Power**  
340 Great Western Street, Rusholme, Manchester, M14 4DS  
fax: 0161 248 9310  
e-mail: UndergndPwr@gn.apc.org  
*(An organisation run by and for young people)*

**Anti-bullying Campaign**  
6 Borough High Street, London SE1  
0171 378 1446

**1 in 12 Club**  
21-21 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 2TT  
*(A club for the unemployed and low-waged, run on anarchist principles)*

**Brambles Housing Co-operative**  
82 Andover Street, Sheffield, S3 9EG  
*(Home education in a co-operative setting)*

**World University Service**  
20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN  
*(Promotes education for international development; also runs refugee advice line on 0171 288 4603)*

**Scottish Civil Liberty Trust**  
146 Holland Street, Glasgow, G2 4NG  
0141 332 5960  
*(Provides legal information and has published a series of leaflets aimed at young people in Scotland)*

**We don't have room here for a comprehensive list of all schools, groups and resources available. For that see our new up-dated handbook, or our website.**

## International

**Connect**  
12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070, Victoria, AUSTRALIA  
00 613 9489 9052, fax: 00 613 9344 8256  
*(Newsletter of youth participation in education)*

**Netzwerk**  
Schweglerstrasse 43/4, 1150 Vienna, AUSTRIA  
00 43 1 983 3440  
*(Network of alternative schools in Austria)*

**Dansk Friskoleforening**  
Prices Havevej 11, DK 5600 Faaborg, DENMARK  
00 45 62 613013  
*(An association which represents 195 free primary and lower secondary schools)*

**The Pestalozzi School**  
Casilla 17/11/6679, Quito, ECUADOR

**L'ANEN**  
1, Rue des Nefliers, 31400 Toulouse, FRANCE  
00 33 61 554488  
*(National association for the development of new education)*

**Possible**  
Agence Informations Enfance, 29 Rue Davy, 75017 Paris, FRANCE  
00 33 1 42 287164, fax: 00 33 1 42 266012  
*(Publishes an annual guide to alternative education in France)*

**Bundesverband der Freien Alternativeschulen**  
Wiemelhauser Strasse 270, 44799 Bochum, GERMANY  
00 49 234 72648, fax: 00 49 234 76053

**Mirambika**  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Aurobind Marg, New Delhi 110016, INDIA

**Democratic School of Hadera**  
Schunat Brandess, Hadera, ISRAEL  
00 972 6 337448, fax: 00 972 6 344146

**Tokyo Shure**  
1-9-19 Kisimachi, Kita, Tokyo 114, JAPAN  
00 81 3 5993 5588

**Tamariki Free School**  
86 St John's Street, Christchurch 6, NEW ZEALAND  
e-mail: tamariki@clear.net.nz

**Young Voices**  
Norwegian People's Aid  
PO Box 8844 Youngstorget, 0028 Oslo, NORWAY  
*(Helps children and young people to express their concerns to people in power)*

**The Hope Flowers School**  
Al Amal, The Hope Flowers School, POB 732, Bethlehem, PALESTINE

**Aula Libre**  
Apt 88, 22520 Fraga, SPAIN  
*(Libertarian pedagogical magazine)*

**SAC (Syndikalisterna)**  
Svenvagen 98, 113 50 Stockholm, SWEDEN  
00 46 8 343559

**Jurg Jegge,**  
Stiftung Martplatz, Postfach, 8427 Rorbas, SWITZERLAND  
*(Runs an apprenticeship scheme for those who find it hard to get started)*

**AERO,**  
417 Roslyn Heights, New York, NY 11577, USA  
00 1 516 621 2195, fax: 00 1 516 625 3257

**Sudbury Valley School,**  
2 Winch Street, Framingham, MA 01701, USA

# LIB ED

No.30 Summer '99 £1.50

**LITERACY**  
How an hour  
of boredom  
has been  
introduced  
into Britain's  
schools

**BAREFOOT  
COLLEGE**  
where  
everyone  
teaches and  
learns

A magazine for the liberation of learning



*“On other days it can seem quite sane and conventional”  
A student reflects on her ‘alternative’ school*



# Welcome to LIB ED

A magazine for the liberation of learning

Vol 2 No 30 Summer 1999

THIS EDITION of the magazine offers our usual variety of articles, ideas, reviews and analysis, plus letters, comment and humour.

The first three articles all present different - and critical - views of the Literacy Hour, as adopted under a certain amount of pressure from Central Government by primary schools across the UK.

The first - **Set up to fail** on page 3 - looks at how the Literacy Hour fails to take account of our individual differences as learners and generally shows a lack of respect or consideration for students or teachers. While acknowledging the importance of literacy for all, it suggests that a more realistic and appropriate Literacy Strategy would take more account of the development of personality and relationships than mechanical government decrees.

**The wrong 3-Rs** on page 4 describes how the Literacy Hour has found its way into special schools where it is wholly inappropriate. It is not literacy as a goal for all that is the problem, but the application of a heavy-handed government strategy for children with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Instead, a new 3-Rs (Routine, Repetition and Real life) is suggested as having far more relevance for these children.

On page 5, Beatrix Oliver, a primary school student, describes the Literacy Hour as **An hour of boredom**. She details some of its least appealing features and asks the eternal educational question "what about self-determination?"

We visit the **Barefoot College** in the desert state of Rajasthan in India on page 6. A flourishing non-formal education project has developed in one of the country's poorest areas.

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Lib ED magazine is collectively written (unless otherwise stated) and edited by the Libertarian Education Collective: Anne, Bar, Clive, David, George, John, Michael, Pat and Richard. We can be contacted at Phoenix House, 157 Wells Road, Bristol, BS4 2BU.

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In an attempt to divert our readers away from the real issues, *LIB ED* has instigated a new **Modern Manners** column (page 7) which combines right-wing bigotry and political incorrectness with a heartfelt yearning for the good old days when children were to be seen and not heard...

In **Shifting Sands** on pages 8-9, Immalee Gould, a student at the progressive Sands School in Devon, looks at a variety of opinions 'from the inside' as to what makes a progressive school work. She concludes that it is a flexibility of attitude, the accommodation of differing priorities and the apparent disorganisation that is the strength of such a school, and this in turn prepares its students for the real world outside.

On page 10, Curriculum Cop's **Biggles over Serbia** provides us with his usual hard-hitting and uncompromising stance on education policy, sex, genetic modification, sex, war in Serbia, and more sex...

**Anarchy in Gotham City** (page 13) is a review of a new super-hero comic title called *Anarchy*, in which the chief protagonist is an anarchist whose priorities are to challenge the "old power structures and their fascist ways." Also reviewed is *Relax* by Catherine O'Neill which is a book for children which explores and explains some of the stresses and strains of everyday life, and suggests ways to understand and deal with these.

**Life of Brian** (page 14) is a review of Brian Simon's autobiographical *A Life in Education* which focuses on the development of British state education since World War II under Tory and Labour, initially looking at it from a fairly radical Marxist viewpoint. However, Brian Simon fails to see through New Labour's propaganda smokescreen, believing that the present government offers a genuinely radical alternative to the Tories.

**Letters** are on page 15. Details of **back issues** and **how to subscribe** can be found on pages 11 and 12.

Don't miss the next issue!

## Set up to fail

The UK National Literacy Strategy and the Literacy Hour are simply confusing, frustrating and often boring. Hundreds of thousands of school children have been set up to fail, argues JON ATKINSON, a literacy worker, in the first of a series of articles on this key area of education.

SINCE ITS election in 1997, the Labour government in the UK has stressed that it puts literacy at the top of its education agenda. This has been most clearly outlined in its National Literacy Strategy, the central plank of which is the daily Literacy Hour in primary schools.

*literacy permits wider access to information, independent learning and self-determination*

Literacy is essential in our society, and many radical educationalists (such as Paolo Freire) have long stressed the need for literacy for self-empowerment and self-determination in the developing world. Of course, some purists may argue that literacy can be seen as a form of 'cultural imperialism' perpetuated by those who are highly literate. However, to take this line is to miss the point: basically, literacy permits wider access to information, independent learning and self-determination. What you choose to do with any skill once you have it is, of course, your own business. The literate minority around the world has held the power and the purse strings for hundreds of years. By contrast, the

wider the spread of literacy in any society, the better is the possibility for an informed, democratic and decentralised society.

However, it is also true that we have different educational needs, wants, abilities and learning strategies. The Literacy Hour fails to take this into account, with its four main sections and its preordained structure. Of course, the government literature on the subject is careful to cover itself on all fronts by acknowledging different needs and abilities, but any educational plan which does not have flexibility and scope for following an interesting tangent is almost set up to fail its client group, the students.

In a similar way to the National Curriculum, the Literacy Hour assumes a degree of uniformity which does not and cannot exist. The frustration of teachers, classroom support workers and school children stems from the fact that, although a number - perhaps the majority - of them can get along with the Literacy Hour, there are many for whom it is totally inappropriate, particularly those at the extremes of the ability spectrum.

Libertarian education is essentially defined by its desire and attempts to make education attractive and appropriate on an individual level for those for whom it exists (yep, those students again). Naturally, in the less-than-ideal world of the state system, there are massive constraints on classroom practice, regarding time, energy, resources and activities. I am not arguing here for structurelessness in the classroom, just for a little bit more sensitivity to the actual individual needs of individual students in

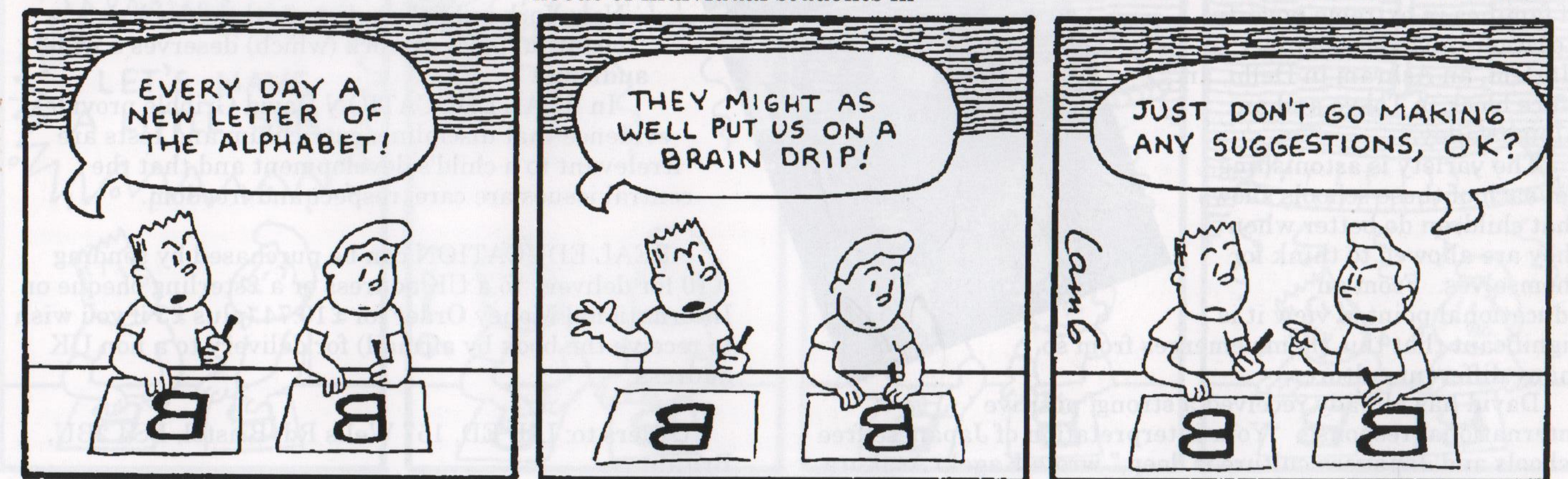
individual classrooms with individual teachers and support staff. At the very least, it should be these latter who define the structure; in an ideal world, this should be done in collaboration with the students too.

Of course much educational practice is strongly affected by the personalities involved, and this is where much current thinking, both in education and beyond, falls down. There is a move to introduce 'standards of practice' into all professional life, such that personality is to be removed from the job in hand. Apart from sounding a little bit like the process of industrialisation in the Industrial Revolution or the development of production lines in the twentieth century, this ignores the fact that what we are talking about here - classroom-based education - is absolutely centred upon people and

*the Literacy Hour is an ill thought out and half-baked scheme*

personalities. One of the most important activities of the classroom should be the development of relationships and the drawing out of personalities, not the pursuit of central government decrees.

The idea of imposing from on high





# The wrong 3-Rs

**Why are some teachers being encouraged to introduce Literacy Hour into schools for children with Severe Learning Difficulties asks ROSE FAULKNER, a speech and language therapist, when it is clearly not appropriate for many of these children?**

THE SCOURGE of many a primary school classroom, Literacy Hour, has somehow found its way into special schools. The Government Literacy Strategy is not compulsory in Special Schools, but the DFEE will support any special school who voluntarily 'opts in'.

It has found its way not only into special schools where children have moderate difficulties and have already developed some literacy skills, but into schools for children with severe, complex and long-term learning difficulties. One such school in the North of England is currently being held up by the Local Education Authority as a model of good practice, where children with idiosyncratic learning skills are subjected on a weekly basis to 'that big book'.

The population of this school has severe learning difficulties: for those of us who acknowledge IQ scores, these

children would score in the bottom 1%, some having multiple impairments involving vision, hearing, and physical as well as cognitive development. How then, can literacy be addressed, never mind Literacy Hour? I hold very high expectations for all young people, including those with major obstacles to their learning, but yet I fail to see the benefits of introducing Literacy Hour to these children.

Children with severe and complex learning difficulties need their learning to be concrete, real and experiential. Their concept development is slow and real life experiences are repeated on a daily basis to build up awareness of self and the surrounding environment.

The three Rs for these children are Routine, Repetition and Real life.

How then can children with no imagination, whose whole lives are based in the here-and-now, be expected to gain anything from a huge book,

with beautifully illustrated line drawings, and a story about people and places they have never encountered? These children extract meaning from real objects presented in context so that, for example, a spoon presented every day at 12.00 comes, over time, to mean dinner time, and a coat presented every day at 3.15pm comes to mean home time. These children have a limited concept of 'bookness': a book could be something which makes a good noise when you drop it, and even this could be progress, a sign that the child is interacting with her environment.

If only the resources of time, money, effort and enthusiasm had been directed usefully at allowing children to access a wider range of individually appropriate experiences it would have been money well spent... If only more photographs of more people and places could have been made available to individuals to enable them to make choices... If only more staff were made available for more one-to-one intensive interaction times... If only more toys were designed or adapted so that children with complex difficulties also get to have fun... If only...

The list is long and nowhere on that list would you find any reference to Literacy Hour.

So what do these children with severe, complex and long-term learning difficulties get from 'Literacy Hour'? Another layer of confusion to inhibit future learning, another lesson in dependence and another experience of failure.

Children come to literacy naturally when communication skills have developed sufficiently to support it. Strong foundations are necessary in order to develop literacy skills. Object recognition, picture recognition, cause and effect, symbolic awareness, and a developing imagination are just a few of the foundation skills required. I don't think there's a teacher in the country who would disagree with these pre-literacy skills. Why then are some teachers being encouraged to introduce Literacy Hour into Schools for children with Severe Learning Difficulties?

# An hour of boredom

**The Literacy Hour has changed BEATRIX OLIVER's day at school. She tells LIB ED how it is for the worse.**

THE LITERACY Hour has changed my day at school by taking up lots of the space and time on doing one kind of thing, like writing out sentence after sentence putting in the full stops and commas. This is completely boring because I've already done that two or three years ago.

I find it much more boring than English lessons used to be because I have already done so much of the stuff in previous years. It's incredibly boring, and I don't think it's worth going back to things over and over again that you've been told about several times and you've already got it lodged in your brain.

We have to do text work for half of the hour, where we have to pick out sentences in stories and change them in different ways putting the words in a different order or altering the grammar. Then we get told what each group is doing and it's always writing things out such as stories, or copying from a workbook adding words that they have missed out for example.

I have learned about the speech marks and where you have to put the inverted commas and punctuation, and also about the starting a new paragraph when a new person is speaking.

We don't get to read our books unless we finish our task in the Literacy Hour. But we do have group reading out loud to each other sometimes. Group reading is when we have the same book shared between two of us and we go round in a circle reading a

page each.

It is too long - we have to have a whole hour of it and soon we're going to have a whole hour of maths as well.

I think it will be total pandemonium because all the teachers will be

*It's not worth going back to things over and over that you've been told about several times and you've already got lodged in your brain*

whizzing around trying to think of something to do for both the 'hours'. It is very stressful for the teachers having to do something set by the government instead of doing something they plan for themselves. Also, it means there's no time for the children to decide what they want to do, or to finish off what they were doing the other day, or just to read and write in their own way.

another ill-thought-through and half-baked scheme such as the Literacy Hour appears to be yet another case of New Labour continuing with their dangerous game of centralisation with a distinct lack of accountability. There is nothing wrong with stressing literacy as a vital component of modern education practice. What is wrong is to assume that a centrally-devised strategy, no matter how evidence-based, is going to

*It's another case of New Labour continuing with their dangerous game of centralisation with a distinct lack of accountability*

be appropriate for all. This is then compounded by inadequate resourcing, training and time.

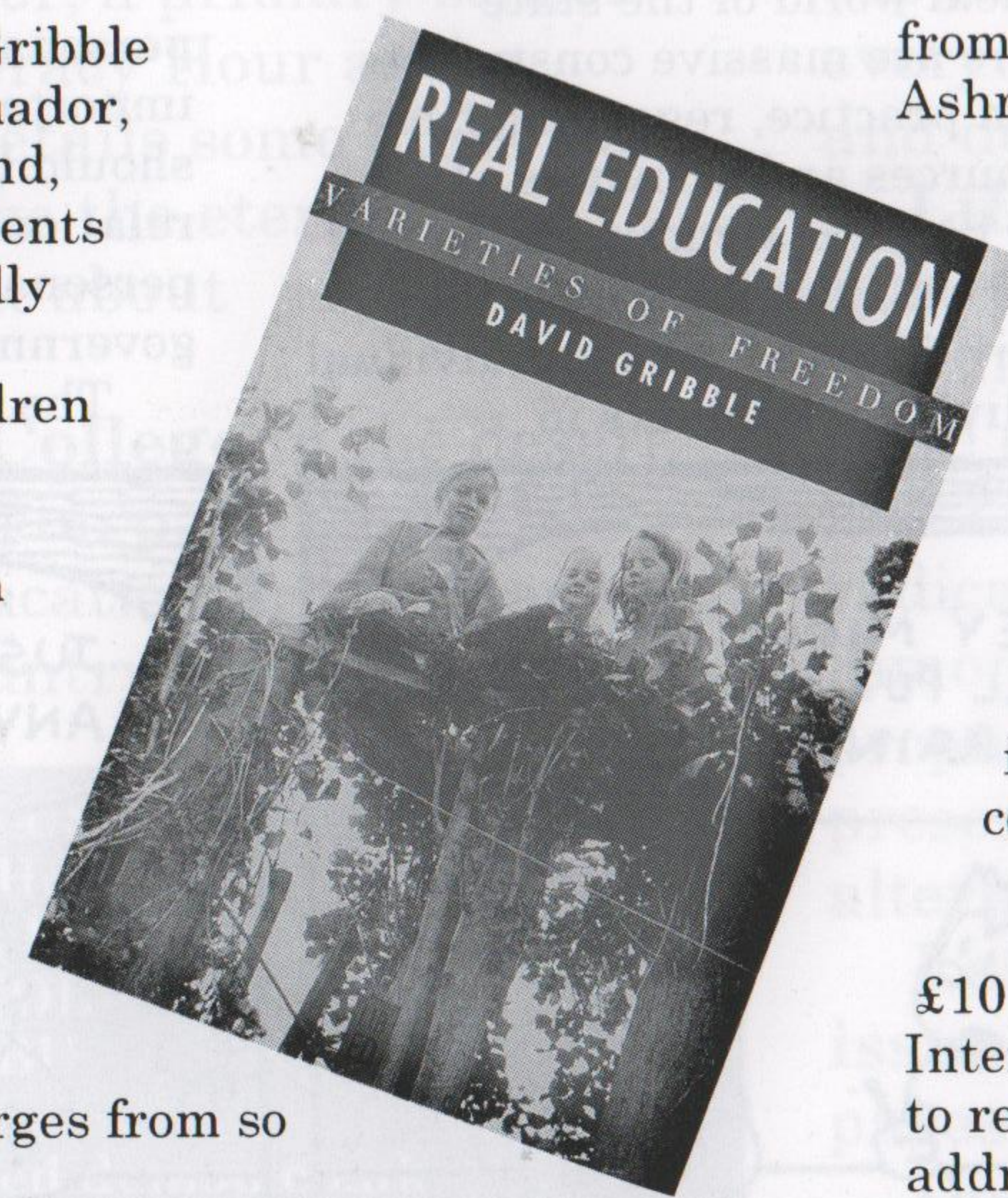
Sadly for hundreds of thousands of school children, the National Literacy Strategy and the Literacy Hour are simply confusing, frustrating and often boring. They have been set up to fail.

## REAL EDUCATION: varieties of freedom

REAL EDUCATION by David Gribble describes schools in Britain, Ecuador, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA. Students vary from the children of carefully selected fee-paying parents to educational rejects and the children of families in extreme poverty. Locations include inner city Harlem, an Ashram in Delhi, an office block in Tokyo and an Alpine valley.

The variety is astonishing, yet each of these schools shows that children do better when they are allowed to think for themselves. From an educational point of view it is significant that this theme emerges from so many different cultures.

David has already received a strong, positive international response. "Your interpretation of Japanese free schools and Japanese culture is deep," wrote Kageki Asakura

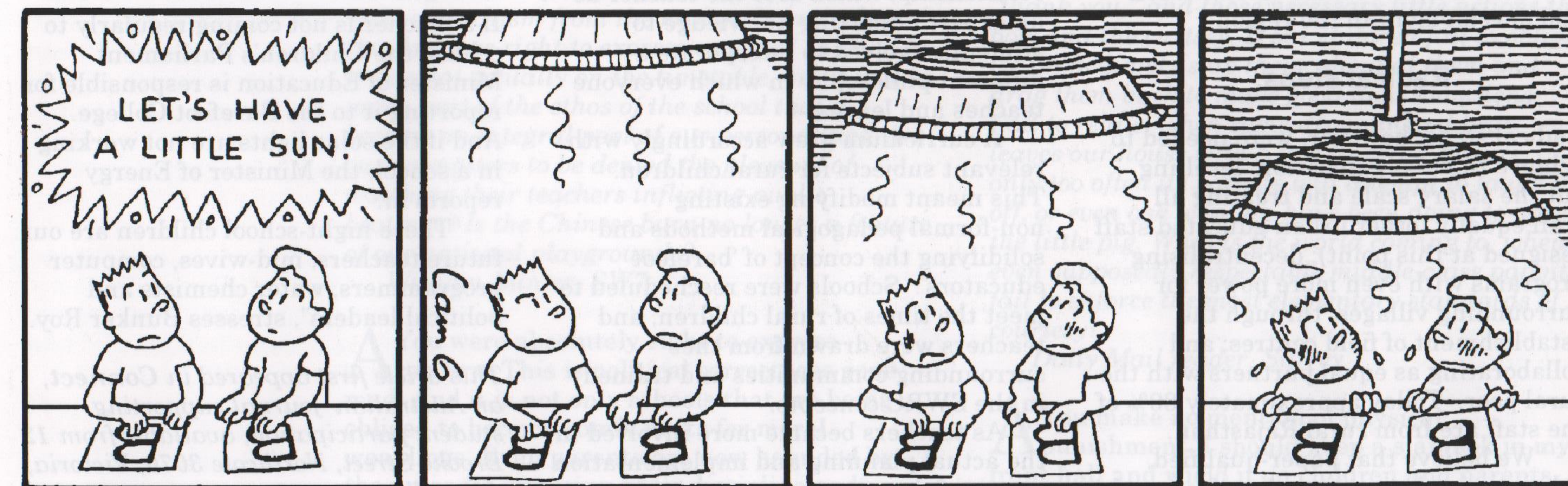


from Tokyo. Matthijs Cornelissen of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India, commented, "I was happy to sense the love and respect which you so obviously feel towards the young people you interviewed." Pat Edwards of Tamariki Free School, New Zealand, said, "You caught the feel of the school really well." Sidney Solomon, a New York publisher, described the book as a "beautiful piece of work (which) deserves a wide audience."

In REAL EDUCATION David Gribble provides evidence that discipline, curriculum and tests are irrelevant to a child's development and that the central issues are care, respect and freedom.

REAL EDUCATION can be purchased by sending £10 for delivery to a UK address or a £sterling cheque or International Money Order for £10.74 (plus £3 if you wish to receive the book by airmail) for delivery to a non UK address.

Orders to: LIB ED, 157 Wells Rd, Bristol, BS4 2BU, Britain.





# Barefoot in the desert

**In a semi-arid state in north western India, where most people survive on subsistence farming or manual labour, a flourishing non-formal education project has developed.**

RAJASTHAN is one of India's largest and poorest states with a population of over 4 million. 45% of adult males and 80% of all females are illiterate. More than half the children of school age (6-14 years) do not attend school, and the majority of these are girls.

The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) officially started in 1972 in the village of Tilonia, one of 110 villages in Silora Block in the Ajmer District of Rajasthan. Its founder, Bunker Roy, wanted to break away from the Indian social work traditions which had an urban, middle class and academic orientation. He wished to set up a voluntary organisation that would attract young, urban professionals to come and work with local villagers in an integrated development process.

## Natural interaction

SWRC Tilonia, or the Barefoot College as it later came to be called, began informally and small. The project spread through the natural interaction of the staff with the local community as the needs of the area were slowly revealed.

In about 1979, it became apparent that urban-trained professionals did not have the capacity to stay for long periods in rural areas. The movement towards sustainability took a further step forward. The rural poor became more involved in Tilonia as the urban-based professionals stepped aside. The project's self-evaluation process and on-going experience meant that concepts of development, education, experts, professionalism and research have been redefined. The result is an organisation which has become a creative leader in education and development in the region.

## Radical steps

Radical steps, however, were needed to achieve this reorganisation: levelling out the salary scale and treating all staff equally (other urban-educated staff resigned at this point); decentralising programs with even more power for surrounding villages, through the establishment of field centres; and collaborating as equal partners with the rural poor. Today approximately 80% of the staff are from rural Rajasthan.

"We believe that paper-qualified, urban-trained experts and professionals

can easily be replaced by people from the village", says Bunker Roy. "People in Tilonia do not need knowledge - they need confidence and assurance that the skills they already have are enough to improve their quality of life."

Tilonia has five non-negotiable values that are the foundation of all its programmes: equality; collective decision making; self-reliance; decentralisation; and austerity.

Tilonia's education programmes are seen as a means of creating self-esteem and appropriate skills. They contribute to the learners' community and arouse awareness about the environment and the forces that dominate development. Literacy and numeracy are part of this process but are not the central goals.

The aim is to nurture learning for those who have been let down by the formal system or who have no chance of joining it. The formal education system is solely oriented to meet the needs of the middle class as school hours and vacation schedules do not suit rural children, and the curriculum has an urban bias which can only prepare students for government and professional employment. The language of instruction, in formal schooling, generally forces children to learn in a tongue other than their own and schools are often not located within reasonable walking distance for young children.

## Everyone teaches and learns

Three experimental schools were founded in 1975 to test new methodologies of non-formal education such as the use of folklore, songs, puppetry and theatre in class. The conventional teacher-student relationship, which sees the teacher as an expert imparting knowledge to students, evolved to incorporate a different philosophy in which everyone teaches and learns.

A curriculum grew accordingly with relevant subjects for rural children. This meant modifying existing non-formal pedagogical methods and solidifying the concept of 'barefoot educators'. Schools were rescheduled to meet the times of rural children, and teachers were drawn from the surrounding communities and trained in the SWRC concepts.

As teachers became more involved in the actual planning and implementation stages of the programs, a questioning

of the role of education in the development process occurred, particularly the role of the night school in relation to the SWRC. It appeared that the night schools could serve as a structure around which development could take shape.

Although forty day-care centres and four day-schools are now run through the Barefoot College, the emphasis is on the 150 night schools, which have now been established in 89 villages for more than 3,000 children who work during the day.

## Equality

Girls' education is given special emphasis, as over 60% of the night school students are girls. The Village Education Committees and the night school teachers talk with parents who are not sending their children to school and do their best to persuade them. The equality of girls and women in society is continually stressed.

These values are certainly being communicated since the children themselves have elected a girl Prime Minister, Kaushalya Devi (a 14 year old student who looks after goats in the morning), for their Children's Parliament.

This parliament is an exciting innovation of the Barefoot College. Children participate in elections that parallel the political structure of the main government. They elect a Prime Minister, ministers and a legislative assembly. The Parliament enables the children to become actively involved in the functioning of their school.

## "Our future"

If a teacher is not coming regularly to school, the Children's Parliament Minister of Education is responsible for reporting it to the Barefoot College. And if the solar lights are not working in a school, the Minister of Energy reports in.

"These night-school children are our future teachers, mid-wives, computer programmers, water chemists and political leaders", stresses Bunker Roy.

*This article first appeared in Connect, an Australian journal supporting student participation, available from 12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070, Victoria, Australia.*



**I should keep a sjambok in my front hall and wield it on children and parents alike**

# It's just Modern Manners

**LIB ED** responds to a rush of letters from people concerned about the ever-worsening behaviour of the younger generation.

**Q** My grandfather often tells me of the "japes" and "pranks" that he and his fellows used to play on the schoolmasters in the good old days when education was education. Many a time they placed drawing-pins upon the masters' chairs, or hid grass-snakes in their desks. Is it still correct to play such tricks, or has schooling become so sloppy that such practices are no longer acceptable?

Tom Brown, Rugby

**A** You are quite right to regret the passing of the drawing-pin and grass-snake jokes. However, the baiting of masters is still absolutely de rigueur. A Tellytubbies video recorded over the history teacher's tape of those dreadful programmes about the First World War is always good for a laugh.

**Q** Since my parents have taken me out of school and begun to teach me at home, they insist on me calling them "Miss" and "Sir," and speaking of them as "Mr. and Mrs. Woodhead." I find this form of address unnatural, and would prefer to revert to my earlier custom of calling them "Mama" and "Papa." How can I most tactfully put forward this idea?

Name and address supplied

**A** There is no tactful way of criticising your parents' demands. Either you abandon all pretence of good manners and greet them regularly with obscenities, or you submit to whatever form of address they require. If I may permit myself to criticise your parents' choice of nomenclature, I think they might possibly consider requiring you to address your mother as "Madam" rather than "Miss."

**Q** As a parent of two eleven-year-old twin boys, I recently caused quite a rumpus at a PTA meeting when I queried the absence of sado-masochism from the national curriculum. Surely I was right to express concern? In my day it was not actually on the timetable, but it was so much part of the ethos of the school that it became an integral part of our personalities. Are our youngsters to be denied the pleasure of watching their teachers inflicting public beatings? Is the Chinese burn no longer a feature of our national playgrounds?

William Bunter, SW7

**A** You were absolutely right to express concern. This is political correctness gone mad. And it is not only schools that are being obliged to become comfy nests for moral weaklings. Even parents are now hounded by the press for imposing basic discipline and

requiring absolute obedience. You must continue to do whatever you like to your two eleven-year-olds, and show the world that you are indifferent to its namby-pamby moralising.

**Q** I have a problem with motoring etiquette. When I deliver my children to their primary school every morning on my way to work, I have very little time to spare, and it is important for me to drive off as soon as they are out of the car. However, the road is often blocked by children whose parents are so indifferent to their safety that they force them to walk to school. How can I draw the attention of these parents to the inconvenience they are causing?

D. Dastardly, Mutley

**A** There is no real difficulty here. I suggest that either you overcome your unnecessary squeamishness and simply drive over any pauper children who may find themselves in your path, or else take what I would recommend as a wiser course on many counts, and send your children to private boarding schools. Either solution would be effective, but whereas the former course might make for some unpleasantness, the latter would allow you to spend longer over your breakfast every day.

**Q** When my parents come home from work all they do is help themselves to snacks from the fridge and then slump in front of the television until it is time for them to go to bed. Is this behaviour correct, or can you offer guidelines for an alternative?

Tommy Tucker, Dreamland

**A** Most modern manuals of etiquette allow this behaviour. Gone are the days when children could demand that their parents feed them and converse with them. Remember that your parents have lives of their own and do not always expect them to put you first when there is a conflict of interest.

**Q** I am concerned that many of the parents of our children's friends seem to have no idea of cultivating good manners. My wife and I always insist on those necessary little words "please" and "thank you," and those necessary little actions the bow and the curtsy. If our children fail to oblige, we immediately slap them, shout at them and drag them back to make good their omissions. Sad to relate, when some ill-mannered brat leaves our house with a two-fingered gesture, only too often its parents will attempt to laugh it off, or even ask what we have been doing to upset the little pig. What is the world coming to, when even supposedly respectable middle-class parents fail to enforce the most elementary standards of courtesy?

Daily Mail reader, Surrey

**A** You make no mention of physical punishment. I should keep a sjambok in my front hall and wield it on children and parents alike.



# Shifting Sands

**Immalee Gould reflects on her understanding of progressive education, as she experiences it at Sands School.**

A YEAR ago, after being at Sands School for one year, I thought it had many faults. There was a difference between the way I thought the school should function, according to the principles behind it, and what actually happened.

I set out to establish why the system did not work as well as I imagined it should. I wanted to understand why a group of students and teachers, such as those who had started Sands, given the opportunity to design their own school, would come up with anything other than the best possible solution of their ideals.

I first tried to define what is meant by the term 'progressive education'. I now think that this is impossible, as every progressive school is different to all the others. However, I asked several people to give me their definitions. Here are some of their answers:

*A style of education that puts the child first or at least on equal footing with adults. By that I mean that we consider the rights of young people as the same as our own as adults - namely, the right to be heard, to have the right to complain and change things, to have the right to choose what to study and have the right not to participate if the situation demands.*

Sean Bellamy (teacher and founder member of Sands)

*Progressive education is about learning to be yourself and to decide for yourself. It gives you the confidence to interact with adults as people as opposed to authority figures. It works for the children so that they can learn, as opposed to the teachers so that they can teach.*

Adam Cohen (student, 18)

*Progressive education in my mind is: freedom to work at your own pace, to be interested in your work and not to be forced into anything you don't want to do. To support and to be supported, to learn academic work, but also things like having your own opinion and being able to express it. And to have fun and to be happy at the same time as doing work.*

Amelia Hart (student, 13)

*I feel this style of education is trying to make education more real - to have more relevance to life. Decision-making, responsibility, academic learning, social learning, prioritising - all these are important.*

Sybilla Higgs (teacher and founder member of Sands)

Sands gives its students and teachers the freedom to choose. This means that although there are a few 'written' rules to facilitate the smooth running of the school, such as no drugs or alcohol, and the fact that you must allow other people to use the school well, we have no stipulated or set-down philosophies. What "Sands" means is simply the beliefs and attitudes of school members at any given time.

What actually happens in Sands?

It is really hard to say, because it is so different for different people. I followed one student through the first part of a day. It was Monday. She got into school ten minutes late, and after looking at the timetable went up to Maths to find that Nathan, the Maths teacher, was not there because he was trying to sort out an argument between two of the younger boys. When he finally got to class the group spent five minutes yelling at him, then when they finally got down to Maths the discussion digressed and Nathan got carried away

talking about some climbing incident. One of the students decided that dancing on the tables was a good idea. Then someone looked at the clock and realised that the lesson was supposed to have finished five minutes ago. O2 had Science next. My student started going to science but first went to the shop to get a drink. When she came back a friend told her that Vicky, the school secretary, was looking for her, so she went to find Vicky, who was on the phone. When Vicky was free, she told her that her Dad had phoned and wanted her to phone back. This meant that she got to Science ten minutes late.

This is only one student out of forty-seven on a not terribly organised day. Imagine what it can be like on a bad day. On other days it can seem quite sane and conventional, and

students can get down to some serious work.

In a questionnaire I asked students what they thought the bad points of the school were. One of the most common answers was the disorganisation, but I think that if you look into why this occurs then you will probably realise that it isn't a bad point. The reason for the chaos is not that people are not trying to make things work, it is just that other things get in the way. If you give people the option of making their own priorities, then you must accept that they are not always going to put their lessons first.

I am probably one of the students who attend their lessons most regularly, but I do not go to all of them. Sometimes it is just more important to go up to the moors, or watch a video, or

sort out a conflict between other people in school. I am not going to spend the rest of my life in maths lessons, but I am going to spend time with people doing real things. At Sands we realise that lessons are not the most important thing in life. The chaos is just because we allow realness to happen.

Like many other people in the school, I used not to understand that the school really *is* the people in it. I have come to see that there is a difference between what I *assumed* the philosophy of Sands to be, and what it actually is. The school's practice hasn't gone wrong; where it has gone wrong is in not helping people to understand sooner that everybody has a right to a different idea of the school, that this is part of the freedom of choice. They also need to understand that the amount of

freedom of choice students are given in Sands includes the freedom to spend time doing what are perceived as negative activities as well as positive activities, and that that this is not always a bad thing.

At Sands we allow the final decision in ALL issues to be decided by the school meeting. This means that Sands can change radically because of one school meeting. Not to give students this opportunity to try and change the way things happen would be a real shame, because a lot can be learnt from that process. If Sands ever got to a stage where it felt that the school was perfect so there was no more need for change, that it is when it would have failed because it would no longer be giving students and teachers the opportunity to try to make it better.





# Biggles over Serbia

Careful splicing with selected Tory and big business genes has produced the perfect New Labour MP



9.00 Looking over some of the new Third Way Readers designed to interest some more boys in reading.

*Biggles over Serbia* by Alistair Campbell is particularly impressive. Here, Flight Lieutenant Tony Blair, known to his friends as 'Biggles', is leading a bombing raid on Belgrade. The dialogue positively crackles:

"Smart missiles away, Biggles."

"Thanks, Algy." Biggles replies to his devoted Flight Sergeant, Robin 'Algy' Cook.

"Oh dear, Biggles, I'm afraid there was a bus on that bridge! Shit! One of the missiles has hit the Chinese Embassy! Oh fuck, the others are heading for Bulgaria."

"Dont worry, old chap. Collateral damage. Only to be expected. By thunder, some of these smart missiles are too smart by half, eh Algy! Tally Ho!"

Great stuff.

With books of this quality I think we have turned the corner with boys' literacy skills.

10.45 Look at some other titles.

*Hood Robin* gives an up-to-date New Labour spin to the traditional stories. Tony Blair and his Merry Men and Women decide to make friends with the rich. A welcome change.

*Ken Livingstone, I Presume* is an exciting story of African exploration. In this volume, Tony Blair traverses the Dark Continent in search of the much loved Ken Livingstone, finds him and breaks his legs.

More up-market is Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Young Pip (the affectionate nickname given to Tony Blair by all the people whose hopes he has betrayed) is plucked from the obscurity of top public school, Oxford and the Bar by a crazed old hag called Mrs Thatcher, who lives alone in a ramshackle ideological ruin.

She was driven mad when she was deserted by her beloved Conservative Party. Only Pip takes her seriously. But will she be able to foist him on the Labour Party so that she can get her dreadful revenge on humankind and break the hearts of the poor?

I think we all know the answer to that one already.

Still to come, a feminist updating of the *Just William* books: the *Just Clare* stories will feature the much loved Clare Short. They will reveal how whining, self-pitying Clare was turned into an obnoxious, incompetent bully by power and ambition. Not to be missed!

11.30 One of the decisive moments in the government's education strategy. Is sex between sixth formers and their teachers to be criminalised or made compulsory?

Boss Blunkett wants offenders castrated with blunt garden shears, but his guide dog, Woodhead, wants it made compulsory because it can be a very

useful and pleasurable experience, especially for the teacher, know what I mean!

Woodhead claims to have conducted some research in this area.

"Fucking brilliant" was his considered conclusion. His report, *The Shagger's Guide To Sixth Form Totty*, has been published for OFSTED by HMSO at £25, with a free packet of novelty condoms.

12.30 Meeting to consider the application of genetics and genetic modification in schools. The Prime Minister is right behind this one since the successful genetic modification of the Labour Party.

Careful splicing with selected Tory and big business genes has produced the perfect New Labour MP: expensively dressed; impeccably right wing; devoid of principles; without any social conscience; and absolutely obedient.

A triumph of modern science.

He wants us to do the same with teachers. The most promising research has involved splicing typical teacher genes with a mixture of vegetable and rodent genes but all we ever get is a deputy head.

2.45 Working party to consider the new pre-natal National Curriculum.

All foetuses are to be exposed to a programme of educational tapes that will give New Britain's children a head start in the global rat race.

Just when they thought they were safe in the womb, we will expose them to high quality recordings of the multiplication tables, basic grammar and spelling, business studies and a civics course embodying New Labour values.

The civics course is a pedagogic breakthrough. It is spoken by Tony Blair. He introduces himself to the foetuses as their Big Brother who will always be watching over them.

How we can assess the progress of the foetuses with a view to setting the new born is posing some problems. One suggestion is to do it by parental income which is, of course, the best guide to educational achievement anyway.

4.00 Everyone is talking about the latest scandal.

We all knew that Big Tony had been having regular meetings with Thatcher ever since the bombing of Serbia began. Everyone thought it was all pretty innocent. People thought that all that they were doing was talking about killing foreigners and how to exploit it politically. But it seems we were wrong.

Adopting Thatcherite policies is one thing, but this is too terrible to contemplate. I blame Woodhead for putting ideas into his head with that report.

Boss Blunkett is distraught.

For over twenty five years, *LIB ED* has been actively promoting freedom in education by publishing books, pamphlets and magazines and organising meetings, conferences and other events.

## For the Liberation of Learning

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

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

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

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

## LIB ED magazine

*LIB ED* publishes a regular (at present we try to publish 3 a year) magazine to keep readers up to date with the latest developments.

## Next issue

Already planned for the next issue of *LIB ED* magazine: a feature on drugs in school; and a translation of "Stupidity is Learnable" by Jurg Jegge.

## The latest books

*LIB ED* is a publisher of a small selection of books including *Real Education - varieties of freedom* by David Gribble (£8.95/US\$23), *Free School: The White Lion Experience* by Nigel Wright (£4.95/US\$14) and *No Master High or Low: Libertarian education and schooling in Britain 1890-1990* by John Shotton (£7.95/US\$21). If ordering by post add £1.05 for p&p within Britain or 20% of order total (minimum £1.05) for overseas surface delivery plus £3/US\$5 for airmail, if required.

Overseas friends please note: please send a bank draft in sterling. If this is not possible then send a cheque equivalent to the US\$ price quoted, but add US\$14 to cover additional bank charges we incur.

## A do-it-yourself guide

FREEDOM IN EDUCATION is a practical handbook full of ideas on how to make learning more relevant and enjoyable:

- ideas for liberating lessons (with details of resources);
- information about the alternatives to formal education, such as home education and the Education Otherwise network;
- a comprehensive contact list of groups and organisations with real learning at heart - for adults as well as children;
- an extensive booklist;
- how to contact schools where freedom is taken seriously, in Britain and around the world.

Available direct from *LIB ED*, price £3.95 (US\$12) for each copy plus £1.05 towards post and packing (for overseas orders, see previous column).

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# New Book

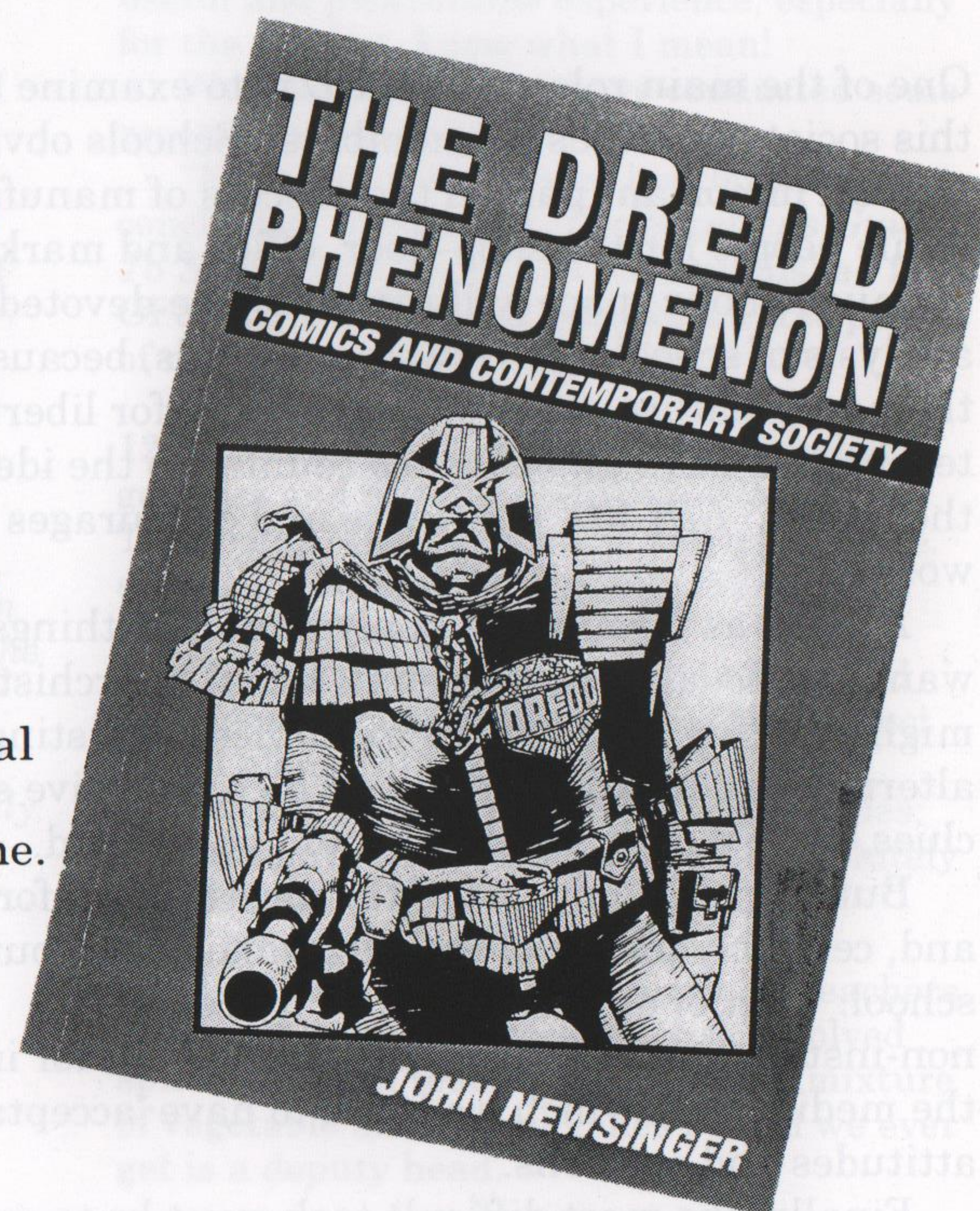
The Dredd Phenomenon - comics and contemporary society

by John Newsinger

Are comics just kids' stuff, or are they a window onto our troubled times? In this book, John Newsinger examines *2000 AD* and the Judge Dredd strip and asks why it is that the most popular comic strip character in Britain is an authoritarian neo-fascist. He goes on to look at the writers *2000AD* has nurtured: Alan Moore, Peter Milligan, Grant Morrison, Garth Ennis and others, and at their impact in America. Comics like *Hellblazer*, *The Preacher*, *From Hell* and *The Invisibles* are at the cutting edge, he argues. They shine light in dark places.

John Newsinger is a lecturer in the school of historical and cultural studies at Bath Spa University College. He is the author of numerous articles and is a regular contributor to *LIB ED* magazine. John is the author of *Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (1994), *Dangerous Men: The SAS and Popular Culture* (1997), *Orwell's Politics* (1999) and he edited *Shaking The World: John Reed's Revolutionary Journalism* (1998).

*The Dredd Phenomenon* will be published by *LIB ED* in October priced £5.95.



## Back Issues Offer

Now in its 27th 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 ED* 17/18 is £2, 23/24 is £4) but for only £15 you can have the complete set of back issues in print. At present that's the issues from Volume 2 listed on the right. 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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# Anarchy in Gotham City

BATMAN first appeared in America sixty years ago, during the Great Depression, a comic book vigilante fighting crime, a multi-millionaire showing social responsibility and looking out for the underdog.

Since then, the character has undergone a number of transformations, most notably the camp TV series of the 1960s, Frank Miller's grim graphic novel of the Dark Knight, and most recently the gothic hero of the Hollywood films. Nevertheless, throughout the years, the mainstay of the Batman franchise has been the comic which remains extremely popular.

At the moment, DC (owned by the Time Warner multi-national) publish five regular monthly Batman titles, monthly Robin and Catwoman titles and a large number of occasional titles about either Batman or other denizens of Gotham City. There is apparently insatiable demand for stories of Bruce Wayne's alter ego.

Over recent months the dominant ethos of the Batman comic book universe has become particularly grim and reactionary. An earthquake has destroyed Gotham and, rather than rebuild, the US government has decided to evacuate most of the survivors and seal the city off. This has left the remnants of the population prey to Gotham's underworld, the victims of a brutal Hobbesian society. Attempting to restore law and order are a rump of the Gotham police force, administering vigilante justice, including summary execution, and the Batman. This is a dark reactionary vision of ordinary people as passive, helpless victims that have to be protected from the wolves.

At the same time as this reactionary vision has come to dominate the Batman comics, DC has launched a new monthly title *Anarky*. The *Anarky* character first appeared in 1989. Created by British writer, Alan Grant, a veteran of *2000AD*, *Anarky* called into question the ideological underpinnings of the Batman universe. Why was it that Batman only ever went after the small fry, leaving the real criminals, the politicians, the businessmen and the bankers free to continue ripping society off? Why was it that the great fights for justice never did anything about an unjust society?

*Anarky* is determined to set the

people free, to overthrow tyranny and to create a just society, and any super-hero that gets in the way has only himself to blame. In comparison, one is tempted to say that Batman is tough on crime but not on the causes of crime!

Coinciding with the launch of the new *Anarky* monthly, DC has



republished, in one volume, all the earlier Batman stories in which the character appeared. This provides a useful opportunity to see the difficulties that the portrayal of an anarchist super-hero is likely to encounter. First of all, there are the conventions of super-hero comics to be negotiated. Grant is not writing an anarchist comic, but a DC super-hero comic with an anarchist protagonist. The stories have

to fit into a universe inhabited by super-heroes and super-villains, into the peculiar mixture of science fiction and the occult that characterises mainstream American comics.

How does Grant get round this limitation? Alongside the traditional adventure narrative there is a running commentary where *Anarky* presents his case. For example, in his letter to his parents, *Anarky* tells the readership:

*"The people society respects, the great and the good, are, in most part, the small and the evil to me. It's as if I see with laser eyes, burning away the surface illusions that hide the fact that we're zombie puppets controlled by somebody else But society is changing. The information revolution allows every man to see that the great and the good are no better than him. The old power structures and their fascist ways cannot compete with the anarchy of tomorrow's technology. The time of the common man is coming. No longer will he have to march to battle as fodder for bankers and arms makers. No longer will he live in a fog of deceit stoked up by politicians' lies. The future is freedom."*

It will be interesting to see how the new monthly *Anarky* lives up to this promise. We shall see.

John Newsinger

## De-stress

Relax

A book by Catherine O'Neill  
*Child's Play (International)*

RELAX is a beautifully illustrated book for young people which outlines, in simple language, the complex nature of stress, tension and relaxation.

In the first half of the book children can be introduced to the concepts of stress and tension and that "what we find funny, others find scary." Various stressful situations (bullying, loneliness, family arguments and the death of a loved one) are outlined simply with colourful drawings which are perfect for encouraging young people to talk about their own similar experiences. The physical symptoms of anxiety, fear or stress are explored and help to explain that shaking, sweating, blushing and crying are natural responses to these 'bad' feelings.

The book then goes on to define 'relax' and to point out that "Learning to explore or understand a problem will make us strong", and that we can begin to do this by reading 'Relax' with a friend or parent, or by talking to people we trust. Ideas on how to relax at

bath-time or cuddling up with a favourite toy move easily into relaxation games adapted from Yoga for children to try alone or with an



adult.

The text is suitable for children aged 8 years and above, but younger children could easily access the ideas if supported by an adult. All in all, *Relax* is a valuable resource to enable young people to deal effectively with the wide range of events and feelings they are exposed to on a daily basis.



# Life of Brian

## A Life in Education

An autobiography by Brian Simon  
*Lawrence and Wishart, pp184, £12.99*

THERE HAVE been many facets to Brian Simon's career in education. He has been a tireless fighter against IQ testing and selection, a staunch advocate of comprehensive schools and an outstanding Marxist historian of education. He has spent his life campaigning for a just, egalitarian and humane education system. This is all reflected in his autobiography.

Missing, however, is the significance of his long-term membership of the Communist Party and support for the Soviet Union. Simon did not resign from the Party over the Khrushchev revelations of Stalin's crimes or the invasion of Hungary. Why did he stay? It is a great pity that this particular loyalty is not explored because, without any doubt, Simon could have contributed to our understanding of British Communism and of the people it attracted.

How was it that so many men and women wholeheartedly committed to progressive causes in Britain nevertheless were able to turn a blind eye to the real nature of the Soviet Union?

What we have instead is Brian Simon's *Life In Education*, a book that takes us through past battles, some won, some lost, but that unfortunately offers no guidance with regard to the battles still to come.

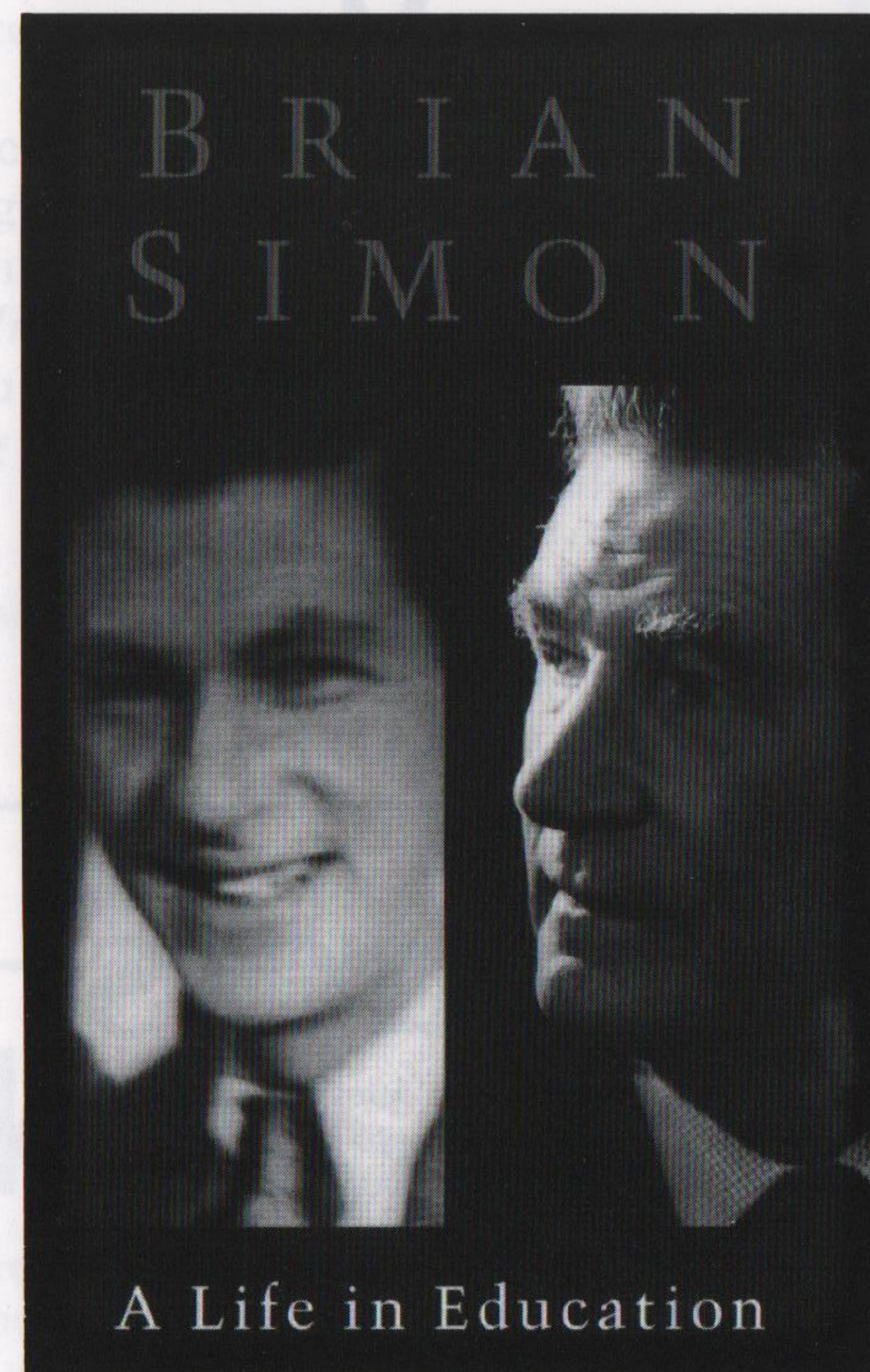
Simon describes his own early experiences as a teacher in Manchester and Salford after the war and it is not too difficult to see this as informing his later campaigning:

*As a form master of first year pupils I found myself increasingly interested in the techniques used to allocate the 90 entrants to the three streams (A, B and C). One point familiar to all teachers, struck me forcibly. Extreme keenness, even enthusiasm, marked the great majority of entrants of eleven years of age. Alienation, lassitude, a general attitude of non-cooperation marked the lower streams three or four years later, especially the classes 3C and 4C. Anyone taking these classes on a Friday afternoon, or indeed at any time, could rely on the total sympathy of the entire staffroom.*

He is not writing about a comprehensive school here, but about a

grammar school, a school that supposedly selected the most able boys. Even within these privileged environs, the grammar school managed to turn the boys in the bottom classes into "pariahs, beyond hope of serious achievement". "What", he asks, "happened between the ages of 11 and 14 to create this situation, with the loss of human potential it entailed?"

It was Simon's concern with this phenomenon that was to fuel his opposition to IQ testing and streaming



and his support for comprehensive schools. His book chronicles the battles with the likes of Cyril Burt, Jensen and co, the progress of comprehensive education and Simon's growing concern with classroom practice. The tide of history seemed to be going his way.

1979, however, saw the beginning of a counter-revolution that was to really get underway with the appointment of the appalling Kenneth Baker as Secretary of State for Education. The culminating point of the Thatcherite assault was Baker's Education Reform Act of 1988 which Simon played a leading role in opposing. Like many other people, Simon's hostility to the Conservatives was such that he did not notice what was taking place in the Labour Party. There is an implicit assumption that New Labour has the same educational commitments as previous Labour Governments. Even given the criticisms that can be made of

the 1945-51 and 1964-70 Labour Governments, it has to be acknowledged that the born-again Thatcherites of New Labour are something else entirely.

As well as being a tireless educational campaigner, Simon was also a major Marxist historian. There seems little doubt that if it were not for the marginalisation of the history of education, he would be recognised as standing alongside the likes of Eric Hobsbawm, EP Thompson and Victor Kiernan in importance.

In closing, let us return to how successful the book is in preparing us for future struggles. The harsh truth is that it is of very little value in this respect. "New Labour, he tells us, has hit the ground running. Early measures gave new hope for the future". He actually claims that the "new consensus on educational advance" that emerged in the mid-1990s was given "concrete expression in the general election of 1 May 1997". Delight at the defeat of the Conservatives has led to a quite incredible naivety with regard to the intentions of New Labour, a naivety that has left us disarmed.

At one point, for example, Simon praises Tessa Blackstone for her part in opposing Kenneth Baker's policies. This same Tessa Blackstone has since been transformed into New Labour's Baroness Blackheart, supporting the abolition of free higher education, abolishing student grants and introducing tuition fees. She will soon be justifying the first privatisation of a British University.

The fact is that as far as education policy is concerned, New Labour is more, repeat more, reactionary than the Conservatives ever dared to be.

Woodhead's influence has increased under David Blunkett; the embrace of big business is more blatant; enthusiasm for the market more open; and teachers are still scapegoated as a way of covering up underfunding. Government ministers support the introduction of setting in primary schools - for children as young as four! Payment by results is to be imposed on the teaching profession, a blatant divide and rule strategy that not even Kenneth Baker dared attempt.

It is New Labour, not the Conservatives, that is going to preside over the privatisation of state schools and local education authorities.

What we urgently need is a Campaign to Save State Education, to save it from the depredations of New Labour.

## The Otherwise Club

Dear *LIB ED*

TOC provides a venue in London for families who are thinking of, or have already begun home-based education. They can discuss their worries and problems with others who are more experienced in the field. The whole family can make invaluable friendships with other home-based educators.

The club meets two days a week. On Thursdays it is open to all those with at least one child of school age out of school and provides the space for workshops and activities for families. What happens at TOC is chosen by those attending.

There are three regular workshops, drama and pottery and a science group for the younger children, but we also run a number of other activities. These have included country dancing, visits from police dogs and their handlers and talks by various experts in different areas relevant to the group, for instance maths, home education and health. There has been African drumming, and a workshop on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a trip to the play. We've been rock-climbing in the Peak District.

TOC has a small cafe which serves a home-made vegetarian lunch as well as tea, coffee and crisps. This raises a small amount of money and serves as a focal point for the community. TOC also keeps a small lending library with books and magazines about alternative education and a large amount of information about activities and exhibitions in London.

On Wednesdays, TOC runs a group for the 8- to 14-year-olds that studies one topic chosen by consensus each year. In 1996 - 1997 we studied the Thames, finishing the year with a four-day trip to Windsor. This group was formed with the intention of enabling young people studying at home to meet and work together on a regular basis.

We are very keen to offer home-educated people of secondary-school age activities and social life so that they do not feel they are losing out if they choose to continue to work at home. With this in mind one of our members is training as a Duke of Edinburgh award leader, and some of

our teenagers began the Duke of Edinburgh Award in September 1997. Others not yet old enough for the award are beginning the Adventure Challenge Scheme.

TOC has a resource library which includes items that are too expensive for our members to buy such as a microscope, an aquascope, large detailed maps of Europe and the world, and camping equipment. For a small fee members can borrow any item in the library.

In the long term TOC is searching for a building which it can purchase with the help of private investors. We will then be able to enlarge the cafe and expand our activities to include more daily workshops and weekend meetings for outsiders who want to know about home-based education. Times will be set aside for different age-group activities. We will be able to have a larger library and resource centre, hold more workshops for all ages and set up a toddler group.

We have recently become a company limited by guarantee and are now a registered charity. We also launched Friends of the Otherwise Club in the autumn of 1997. A Friend of The Otherwise Club is kept in touch with our activities and invited to several events during the year.

Fund-raising is a constant worry. We charge £100 a year per family and some of the workshops must be paid for separately. We've held a jumble sale to help with our rent payments and began raising money towards the expenses of buying a property with a concert.

If you would like more information about TOC or becoming a Friend of the Otherwise Club please contact me.

Leslie Barson

12 Croxley Road, London W9 3HH.

## How about some readers' meetings?

Dear *LIB ED*

Have you ever thought of having Readers' Meetings? It's not a new idea, *Resurgence* mag has been doing it for years.

The idea is to meet once, or more, a year at a different venue around the country, to exchange ideas, give feedback, meet other readers, put faces to names and to discuss issues raised in the magazine.

The benefits are enormous. Not only do people feel more involved, more part of the collective, but there's a closer relationship between the editorial team and the readership.

Perhaps a start might be for a reader or readers to offer a venue and for others to help by contributing offers of food/lifts in exchange?

I would be very interested to hear what other readers think of this idea.

Yours etc

Anne

*We think that this is an excellent idea, Anne. Unfortunately we haven't had the resources to organise a full conference in the last few years. However, we plan to have a meeting at the Conway Hall in London on Saturday 16 October 1999*

**We're always delighted to hear from you.**

**Send your letters to: LIB ED, 157 Wells Road, BS4 2BU or e-mail us at: editors@libed.demon.co.uk**

