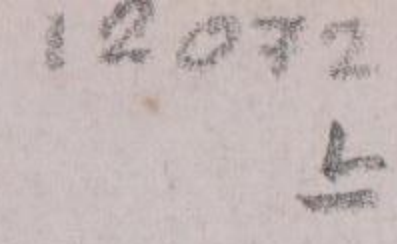


2072  
L

30p



28



# Lib Ed

AUTUMN/WINTER 1979

Is there a libertarian theory of education? In Maureen Clarke's view (*Screen Education* 28), libertarians lack a coherent theory and present no revolutionary strategy for educational change. These are serious charges, and Clarke has raised some important points. We plan a detailed reply for the next issue of Lib Ed, especially as quotes, letters, and individuals' experiences of educational situations have been read as editorial policy.

Why the 'Disasters' article? Although the article is written from an obvious social work perspective, it illuminates how, in Freire's terms, the process of conscientization can take place when people reject the role of victim and take active steps to change their lives. We do not claim that the actions of the people of Aberfan were revolutionary, but, as Ray Hemmings writes on Freire's process, "local actions, some of which may be educational projects, and all of which have educational content," enable "the growth of a critical consciousness which can recognise reality behind a mythicised unreality."

What about the cuts? While we resist the identification of education with schooling, we urge all libertarians to fight the governments' savage attack on schools. The effect of spending cuts, by increasing class sizes, cutting out free milk and subsidised meals, eliminating 'frills' (by which they mean non core-curriculum items) will inevitably make schools more authoritarian and alienating. The education cuts must be seen as part of a concerted attack on the working class, and together with the Corrie anti-abortion bill and cuts in the social services generally, as an attempt to force women back into the home and into traditional roles.

Libertarians must work to radicalise opposition to the cuts, working within rank and file teachers groups and local community campaigns, or wherever we can.

Contact us at:  
6 Beaconsfield Road,  
Leicester, England,  
Tel. (0533) 552085

## Contents

- John Davies writes about disasters on page 3.  
Freire, part 2 by Ray Hemmings on page 10.  
Lynall Hall, a school of interest, page 6.  
State support for alternatives, by Nigel Wright, page 14.  
Information, in whose interest? by Anne Davies, page 8.  
Cut out supplement, some useful addresses on page 15.  
Reviews on pages 9, 13, 17 and 18.



Thanks to Borin van Loon for this issue's excellent graphics. The idea for the cartoon on page 11 and the back cover were taken from the political cartoonist Claudius.

Cover price 30p  
Single copy UK and surface mail abroad 40p  
3 issue sub UK and surface mail abroad for individuals £1  
for institutions and libraries £2  
3 issue sub airmail Europe £2  
3 issue sub airmail elsewhere £2.50  
**BULK ORDERS**  
Our main distributor for bookshops is the PDC  
UK (all other orders) and surface mail abroad  
carriage paid (each) 22p

typeset by Bread 'n' Roses and printed by  
Leicester Community Printing Press

# DISASTERS

The most cursory glance at a newspaper or at the television will confirm that disasters, carnage, destruction, slaughter, and bloodshed are newsworthy items in the extreme. There may, in fact, be many reasons for this obsession with disasters. Certainly, in Western society, where death itself has a low visibility, being generally discreet, private, tidied up, sanitized and clinical, a disaster shatters this myth, laying out the fact of tragedy and helplessness for all to see. The media, of course, play a clearly hypocritical role in this process. When the Invicta Vanguard aircraft crashed in Switzerland on April 10th 1973 the press reacted with hostility towards the large numbers of sightseers on the scene, whose perverse curiosity hampered relief work. Thus the *Guardian* (April 13th 1973) carried a headline outlining the ways in which ghouls prolong the confusion, and the Swiss press spoke of "Schlachtbummeler" or slaughter-seekers. Yet newspapers so often direct their articles and photographs at these so-called ghouls. It is apparently alright to generate, sustain, reinforce and satisfy such ostensibly reprehensible attitudes so long as one is motivated only by the worthy aim of selling newspapers. The cinema industry has been more openly exploitative, making vast fortunes in recent years on disaster movies such as *Jaws*, *The Towering Inferno* and countless other examples of the genre. Clearly disasters, today, have a special meaning for, as Turner (1976) notes: "Never before has the entire human race lived on the edge of one".

An extensive social science literature suggests that the phenomenon of disasters is more illuminating and complex than the orthodox storybook versions one sees in the press would have us believe. There has, however, been a fairly narrow focus in much of this work. By and large, for example, sociologists have been concerned with the negotiation of understanding among disaster victims. Erickson (1979) demonstrates this angle when he notes that "one of the bargains people make with one another in order to maintain their sanity is to share an illusion that they are safe even when the physical evidence in the world around them does not seem to warrant that conclusion".

The emphasis here, then, is clearly upon the mechanisms by which people re-order their existence once that which was unthinkable has occurred. On the other hand, more "practical", policy-initiating studies have either concentrated upon the immediate post-disaster mopping-up stage (Barton) or if venturing beyond this into reconstruction, have incorporated a fairly reductionist bias, being primarily interested in individual response to disaster (Wolfenstein). This last type tends, at least implicitly, to pathologise disaster victims, perhaps inadvertently reinforcing the biblical emphasis upon disaster as punishment and pays scant

attention to the complexity of the social problems that are engendered in post-disaster communities.

This narrow particularist focus, inherent in much of the ideology of social work, reflects what C. Wright Mills calls "an occupationally trained incapacity to rise above a series of cases". As a corrective I will try to elucidate a specifically communal intervention, stressing the importance of an understanding of the interrelationship of history and biography. Only by grasping the totality of the actor-society dynamic in a situation can an adequate strategy for 'helping' disaster victims be constructed. Freire's notion of conscientization may be an appropriate sensitizing concept for such a task. Using the example of Aberfan in South Wales, I will try to emphasise 'therapy' as a working dialogue between 'victim' and 'helper' in which an understanding of the world emerges for them as they act back upon it (a praxis). Central to this argument is an understanding of 'trauma' as helplessness provoked by the destruction, in disaster, of social meaning. Therefore since, by definition, the very fact of disaster illuminates our inappropriate grasp of reality (our illusory belief that the world is a safe place; that our precautions are adequate) mere restoration is clearly insufficient.

To restore a pre-disaster state of affairs is to sustain and reinforce the helplessness of the victims in their oppression, to perpetrate a cruel trick upon them by supporting a meaning system that has already failed them.



Such a strategy was applied after the flood in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, U.S.A. in 1972. Firstly, I will attempt to elucidate and demystify the concept of 'disaster', relying fairly heavily on a paper by Robert Kastenbaum, since much work with disaster victims tends to be rooted in an inadequate 'bolt from the blue' hypothesis which narrowly circumscribes the things we can do in the face of ostensibly, 'greater forces'. "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods—they kill us for their sport." (King Lear).

These attitudes, indicative of what Freire calls 'primitive magical consciousness' must be the focus of attack at all times in a non-oppressive 'helper-victim' dialogue.

### What is a Disaster?

The problem of disaster definition is by no means as straight-forward as it would first seem. Collins English dictionary, for example, defines disaster as a "sudden or great misfortune". If we accept this then we must acknowledge that the capitalist mode of production is itself disaster-prone (if not to say disastrous!). Certainly, colonisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and economic depression were all considerable misfortunes to a lesser or greater extent for their subject populations. Indeed, and interestingly enough, Barton's definitive study of the subject includes, as two of his three main examples, a discussion of the Irish potato famine and of the Hiroshima bombing, without the inevitable causal conclusion being made. On the whole it seems that such events are ideologically excluded as disasters since they do not accord with our everyday storybook criterion.

Because these situations are clearly not natural it appears to be simpler to forget them rather than risk the creation of a separate category of 'political disasters' into which we may be tempted to place yet other ostensibly unexplained affairs. That bastion upon which our orthodox disaster theories rest—the 'bolt from the blue' hypothesis—therefore serves very real vested interests. Kastenbaum states that 'the concept of disaster requires a background of relative stability, normality, 'non-disaster'. An event could not be singled out as catastrophic if chaos and threat reigned at every step and at all times.' Again neither is this singling out an arbitrary or accidental process. Here the dominant ideological analysis operates with what Kastenbaum terms 'levelling and sharpening dynamics'. 'A particular event is identified or carved out of a larger context of instability, misery of jeopardy. This event is 'sharpened' into an official disaster, while the surrounding context is 'levelled off' as though unremarkable. We may find it convenient to regard a few selected events as disasters, while ignoring many other situations in which human misery and danger is hardly less severe.' The emphasis, therefore, must be upon acuity and chronicity as axes along which disasters can best be differentiated. In fact, seldom does an acute disaster strike an area unaccustomed to chronicity, although western TV viewers could be forgiven for believing that certain Third World nations only experience famines and epidemics at times when aid appeals are launched. According to Erikson, 'If the Buffalo Creek flood is viewed as an acute disaster, a sharp and abrupt assault on the integrity of human lives, then the Appalachian experience in general has to be viewed as something akin to a chronic disaster that has worked its way into the human spirit in a more gradual fashion.' Trauma is generally perceived as an effect of disasters.

continued on next page



However, if disasters were defined *because* they produced trauma then the list of what constitutes disasters would lengthen considerably. Since chronic conditions, for example poverty, provoke the numbness, depression and helplessness we associate with disaster, why is it that we do not classify it thus, and what interests are served by this exclusion? Again Kastenbaum offers an explanation—the 'Law of Inverse Magnitude'. This law suggests that 'as physical and emotional distance is increased, so the magnitude of death and destruction must increase by an undetermined but powerful constant before the situation can be classified as disastrous, and call forth appropriate relief efforts.' The tragedy of the Vietnamese Boat people is a clear example of the operation of this law; it is only since a number of these refugees were admitted to Britain that their plight has become an issue of any importance (and again only within the context of a general hysteria about the number of immigrants in this country).

Thus our everyday conceptualisations of disasters are far from neutral and objective. On the one hand our definition of disasters as 'sudden' and 'acute' serves to exclude conditions of social chronicity from our conceptual framework, and on the other hand, our emphasis upon disasters as 'unexpected' and 'natural' serves the same interests by implying that they are beyond our control. But are disasters really 'bolts from the blue'?

#### Are Disasters Natural?

In any system, built upon the accumulation of surplus value, risk-taking will become institutionalised. In the labour-capital equation, the extent to which prevention of disasters is taken on, will be a function of the subject population's bargaining power; their resistance to raised exploitation rates, and the relative costs of such prevention. This would account for the fact that large-scale community disasters primarily befall the comparatively powerless (for example, in Seveso, Flixborough, Aberfan, Buffalo Creek, and throughout the Third World). Once the sharpening dynamics we discussed earlier came into play, the tendency is towards legitimising the situation as "natural" since otherwise, these failures to control disasters become, as Turner notes, "culturally challenging events".

The seductive power of such explanations is obvious, since they do contain a grain of truth—but only the merest grain. Thus the National Coal Board version of the Aberfan disaster blamed "a coincidence of a set of geological factors" (Report of the Tribunal 1967). This is, no doubt, true—the streams under the "fateful" Tip 7 are clearly shown on Ordnance Survey Maps of the locality. However, this does not answer the most important questions about the situation, namely: Why was the tip put there in the first place? And why had it been allowed to remain? Neither do we necessarily pose such questions from the vantage point of retrospect. Indeed, many of the Aberfan people were wise before the event, had complained about flooding on a number of occasions, and were aware of a history of sliding tips in and around the area.

Quite simply, the local people had understandably accepted the empty reassurance of "experts" more concerned with profitability than human safety in a situation which, they hoped, might never happen anyway. Certainly, some disasters do have a "natural" component: but this is seldom the full story. For example, as Kastenbaum asks, "smoke and fire" qualify as natural phenomena. But why did a small and apparently insignificant conflagration in a celebrated night club spread out of control and why were so many patrons trapped inside? We must always approach with caution, therefore, the imputation of natural causation in disasters that, with closer scrutiny, are just as likely to be man made.

#### "Who's there, besides foul weather?" (King Lear)

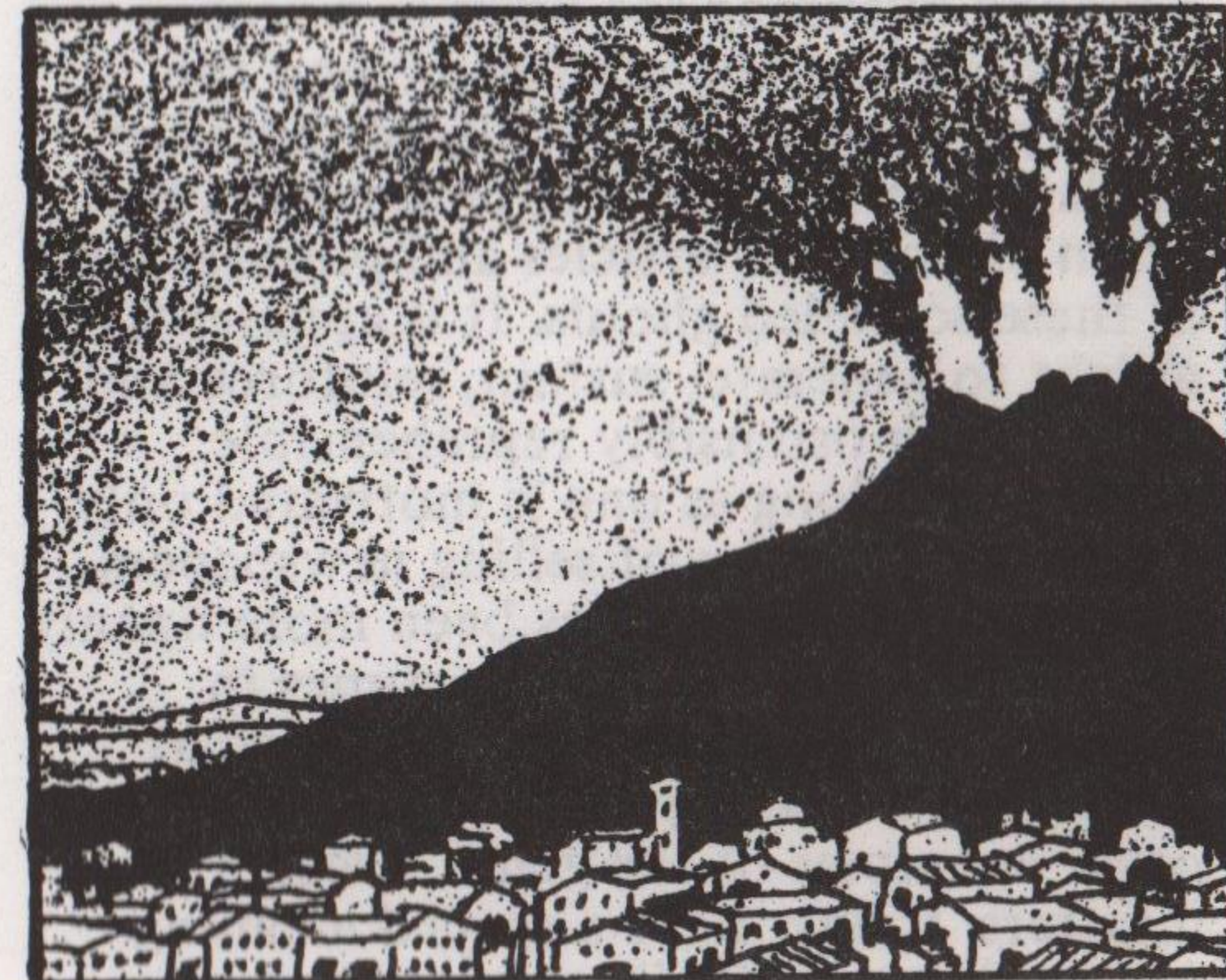
Human factors, such as negligence or irresponsibility, are evident, in disasters, beyond the level of causation. Indeed, the entire scope and magnitude of a catastrophe reflects human action, and reaction to it. In these terms "purely natural phenomena do not exist. The eruption, on May 8th 1902, of Mount Pelee on the island of Martinique, provides a poignant illustration of this fact. A volcanic eruption is a natural event; to posit human culpability would be nonsense; and, again, the extent of this particular eruption was devastating and would have been extraordinary even by standards of nuclear holocaust." (Kastenbaum). However, as Kastenbaum notes, "one can and must still ask the question: Why did almost the entire population of St. Pierre perish that morning? The web of explanation now available to us is depressingly familiar and trivial. Vested political and economic interests thought they had something to gain—victory in an upcoming election—if the threat of major eruption was steadfastly denied. Significant evidence and warnings were discarded, and deliberately falsified information was disseminated through the press. "The volcanic explosions and storms would have laid waste to the city in any event, but there was no need to add 30,000 charred corpses."

#### Gambling—with human stakes

Thus some natural events are patently unavoidable. Whether they become 'disasters' depends, as we have seen, primarily upon the operation of human forces in the total configuration. Nowhere is this more strikingly apparent than in the large numbers of potential victims living in and around high-risk areas. Recently, for example, the people of Seveso, Northern Italy, returned home after a three-year absence, following their exposure to vast quantities of poisonous Dioxin—the result of an explosion in the local Icmesa factory. As McLoughlin comments, the local population's escape from the factory came very late—"the authorities only realised the danger when all the birds died, when cats and dogs and the bodies of little mammals which had lived in an underworld co-existence with the people emerged from the fields and ditches to die untidily a week later.

It was only then that official panic drove the people away from their homes to take refuge in a Milan hotel, some 20 miles away. (Guardian, July 6th 1979). Neither, is it certain that the area is once again safe for habitation, the local people have joined the ranks of the risk-takers—"like San Francisco dwellers who wait for the inevitable earthquake and are prepared to take the risk that it will not be in their lifetime for reasons they may not even define themselves . . . or the Australians who await regular flooding which destroys their lands and damages their homes and kills some of them every time."

The list of risk-takers is in fact considerable. In Britain, for example, Canvey Island, in South East Essex, houses a population of 30,000 plus people, at sea level. This area, with a history of extensive flooding—for example, in 1953—is a singularly inappropriate place, from any angle but profitability, to store the huge quantities of highly inflammable Methane gas and oil that are deposited there, especially since its geographical location admits of only two possible escapes from the area.



Studies in "victimology" have generally shied away from a scrutiny of potential disaster areas, no doubt to avoid "scaremongering" accusations, which is a pity. This exclusion accentuates the possibility that, should a disaster befall one or other of these areas, the relevant authorities and "experts" will still be allowed to pretend they did not know why.

#### Aberfan—The Disaster

On October 26th 1966 a huge tip of mining waste material careered down a steep Welsh valley onto the village of Aberfan, engulfing Pantglas Junior School and a number of houses. On the completion of mopping up operations the death toll stood at 144, including 116 children. The disaster posed the long history of exploitation that the Welsh mining community had suffered (through depressions, pit-accidents, lock-outs, and geographical isolation) for all to see. Millar remarks that "The world reacted to the disaster with shock, horror and perhaps a guilty conscience for 100 years of cheap coal." A disaster fund was initiated immediately and people from 40 countries assuaged their horror and guilt to the tune of £1,750,000. (This last figure being of sufficient magnitude to allow the inevitable disagreements about the price of human lives to constitute the sole "news" from Aberfan for some years.)

Ironically the disaster (no doubt so

visible to the world because the predominant casualties were children) left much of the area intact, as well as much of the communal fabric—the network of human attachments and relationships through which people interpret the world. This was a crucial factor in the stimulation of therapeutic dialogue. Through these relationships and their mediating agencies, the local people came to challenge their previous acquiescence and submersion in the face of oppression. Yet there were other factors equally important, perhaps the most immediate of which was the presence of yet more tips poised above the village. The local people had succumbed before to the hollow reassurance of "experts' advice" about their safety, and were not about to do so a second time. A Tip Removal Committee was established which successfully challenged Government proposals merely to landscape the remaining tips. In the course of their struggle the committee made a number of social and political discoveries—about access to the legitimate power of experts (they employed their own solicitor, and safety advisor) as well as about the importance of solidarity. These discoveries, evident too in the other groups, were to prove vital in the re-creation of community in Aberfan. They helped the people to find a voice, not just in terms of the future, but in the immediate situation. Organised resistance successfully rejected the patronising exclusion of any of the local people from the Disaster Fund Management Committee—an important step in an area subjected to 100 years of paternalism.

In fact committees, discussion groups, and associations proliferated in the post-disaster period. The press took the opportunity to interpret this, along with the much reported squabbles over money, as yet further evidence that Aberfan was, in some way, a delinquent community. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. Most of the groups whether formal or informal, played an important role in the negotiation of a new social reality for the community. This need to communicate, often eradicating social distinctions in favour of a new identity as fellow sufferers is a well-documented post-disaster phenomenon. For example, Prince talked of a "city of comrades" in his discussion of a Halifax ship explosion. More recently Perry et al noted that:

"There seems to be a general reaching out to others and a readiness to share one's resources and experiences, that lasts for a considerable period of time after a disaster"; and Barton recognising the same phenomenon called it "an altruistic community". In Aberfan, as elsewhere, this experience seemed to develop from a mistrust of the officialdom that had failed them; but it went beyond this and became a genuine desire to re-create a more appropriate communal environment. Central to this was a recognition and reliance upon the resources of the community, and a belief that these were sufficient to solve most of the problems they would face. Thus their rejection of expert psychiatric help (other than one caseworker, and a community worker) was a positive move prompted by a realisation of local needs

and not a negative rejection. In fact, both workers, attuned to these feelings were able to play constructive, enabling roles. Thus, for Miller, the community workers in Aberfan "came with no set plan of development or improvement, but with only a belief in the people's power to rebuild what has been shattered. Their method was simply to bring people together, believing that it is in relationships that healing is found and that by working together in a reconciling dialogue the shattered community would be restored."

Even the actual "grief-work" (generally the domain of experts) was largely handled by the bereaved people themselves. Again a group was the situation chosen by the bereaved mothers who best knew their own needs. Here, "they could cry and know that others would not be embarrassed. Even more important they could laugh and not feel guilty and fear they would be thought unfeeling". The social worker did not invade or try to lead the group but she was there if her contribution was sought—otherwise she remained on the periphery, believing that these mothers had sufficient resources themselves, to grasp significance through their dialogue.

It would be an injustice to attempt to outline all the developments in Aberfan since the disaster.

Most of the local people seem to believe that life there is better now than it was before October 1966. There has been a growth in local amenities as well as in communality. The Community Association has been particularly active within the new community centre, for example. But there has been a profound growth in other areas, particularly in cultural life (a male voice choir, an annual carnival, playgroups, amateur dramatics, a young wives group and a youth centre). Most of these groups and events being involved in, and some the product of, the "Way Ahead Conferences", in which all of the people of Aberfan had the opportunity to discuss their vision of the area's future. This too produced results—especially in the creation of a new community magazine "Headway" in which much important community information can be transmitted to enable informed dialogue to continue.

In 1974 Aberfan was host to a major conference as part of what was called "The Year of the Valleys". This conference discussed, among other items, the crisis of the Welsh valleys. Its location in Aberfan was a clear recognition of the alternative which this community has



posed to submission in crisis—that is, that people can become more human by intervening in reality to make their own history.

Thus while they may not have created a utopian society, the people of Aberfan have at least regained their pride as positive actors in the world. Awareness has grown in reality. Some of the comments that Miller has recorded illuminate this: "Before the disaster I was not involved, I am now"; "Before the disaster we existed, now we live."

#### Buffalo Creek: Beyond Restoration

The disaster in Buffalo Creek on February 26th 1972 has many similarities to that at Aberfan. Here, the coal company had stored millions of gallons of water behind a slag heap at the head of the valley, on the middle of three streams. At 8 a.m. on the 26th the heap slipped, forming a massive mud wave that roared down the entire valley. The town of Saunders was obliterated; 4,000 people rendered homeless, and 125 killed.

Again, we need to look fairly closely at the background of the local people to understand their reaction to this event. Erikson brilliantly documents the development of mountain communality, the isolation of the people, their individualism and piety; and their gradual subsumation under a fiercely exploitative coal industry that was incredibly paternalistic. "The tight symmetry of the settlement was reflected in an almost absolute conformity of personal rhythm and style, and everything of value was measured in discreet units—productivity by tons delivered and dollars paid, freedom by hours away from the schedule of work, living space by feet of frontage, and job security by tenths of a decimal point in the curious shifts of the market. Whatever else one may say about it, autonomy and self-respect do not flourish in a climate like this". Moreover, submersion in what Freire calls an "unculture of silence" is more readily understandable in a situation where "the coal operator owned the entire camp, of course, so he served not only as the miners' employer but as their merchant, landlord, mayor, chief of police, banker, and school superintendent. He paid the salaries of the physician, the schoolteacher, the minister, and in all likelihood, every attorney for miles around". The people of Buffalo Creek lived with an historical awareness that only 50 years ago, such was the grip of the coal boss that he could afford to bomb the men as they exercised their right to belong to a union.

The effects of a major disaster on these, anyway, helpless people, was devastating. It was considerably accentuated by the policy of the U.S. Department of Urban Development (H.U.D.) who placed the homeless at random in 7 huge caravan parks. "No effort was made to group people according to old neighbourhood patterns, and as a result most people had to look across the narrow spaces dividing their new quarters at relative strangers".

Thus such constraints meant that the people of Buffalo Creek were never allowed to come together to discuss and

continued on page 17



# LYNALL HALL

I should make it clear from the start, that Lynall Hall is *not* a 'free school' — whatever one means by that. I guess it is a school, within the education system, that tries to give kids some say in their schooling, that tries to be as democratic as possible within those official confines, that tries to teach kids as realistically as possible about the politics of the world they're in.

I'll start with some descriptions.

Brunswick is an inner suburb of Melbourne (in Victoria, Australia). It is an industrial-residential area, about 3 miles from the city centre. Houses tend to be small, one-storey and wooden, with little or no outdoor space—a characterisation, but basically true. Also in the realm of characterisation is a recitation of the statistics about the people of Brunswick—mainly immigrants (over the past 20 years) from Italy, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Yugoslavia etc, plus a minority of working-class Australians of several generations. For many of the immigrant groups, Brunswick is a temporary home before a permanent home in the newer outer suburbs. A chain of relatives, or cheaper rent or houses keeps them in Brunswick for a period of time.

Thus the kids in the schools come from a wide range of backgrounds. It is easy to say that many of them do not speak English at home, that in many cases parents work shifts, that there is a disproportionately large number of single parents. But each family is different, and that is something that few of the teachers in the schools realise.

Too often, the teachers teach to cultural stereotypes, or ignore the diversity altogether and seek to impose their own middle-class prejudices blindly on kids that they see as 'deficient'—because they can't speak English, because they don't dress well, because they value blunt honesty above polite circum-spection. You're familiar with the attitudes.

I taught at Brunswick Girls High School for three years before Lynall Hall was set up, and those years did a lot to clarify my ideas on teaching in a multi-cultural society. That was mainly because I worked on what was called an 'educational task force'—a group of us studying part-time for a post-graduate educational degree based round innovation to meet the needs of the school. But that's another story. (If you want more details of that, chase up a book called *The Urban School*, by L.F. Claydon (Pitman Pacific 1975) in which we all wrote a chapter.)

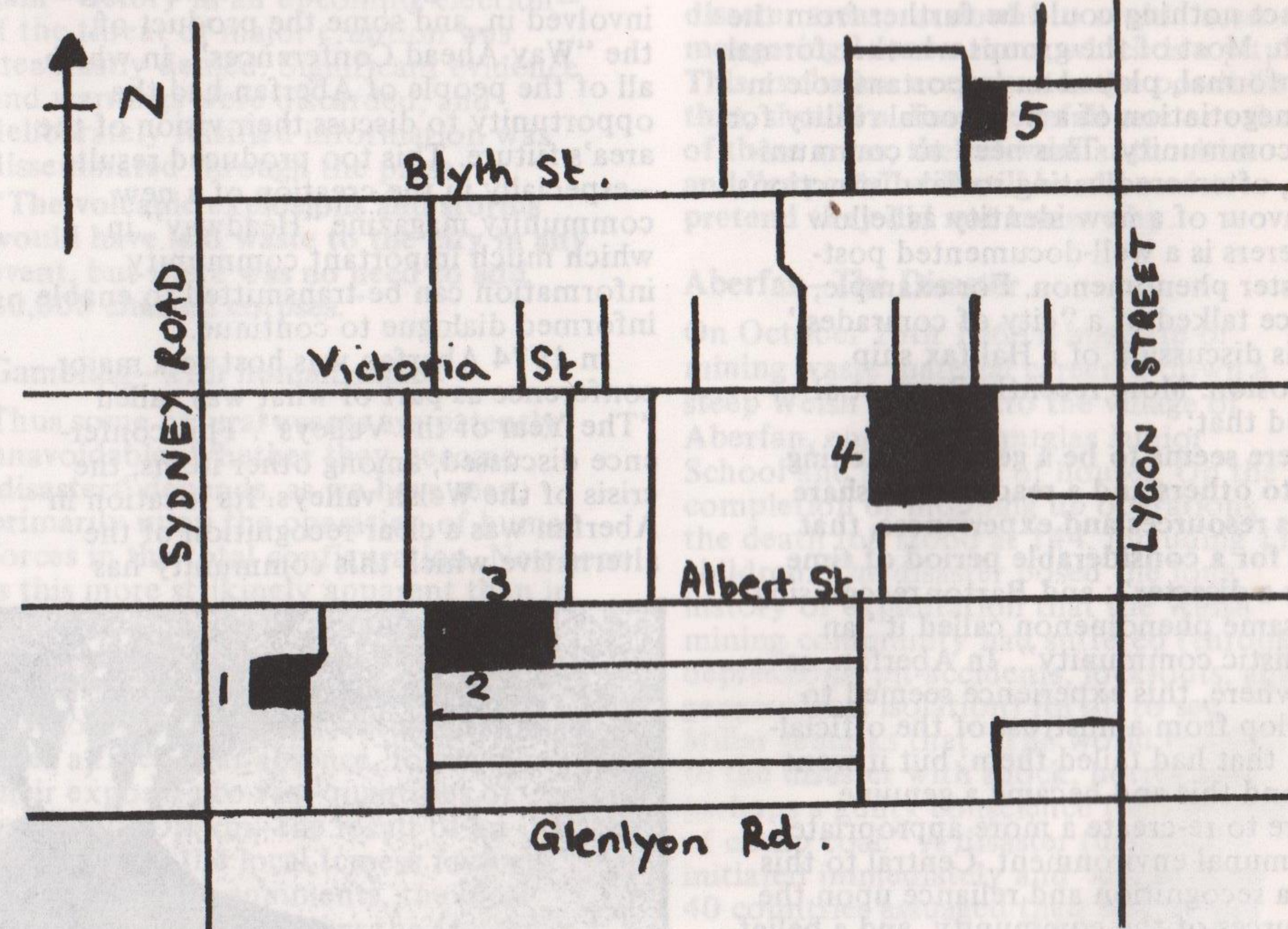
Out of the task force came a number of practical programs—a creche in the

school, our multilingual newspaper *Ascolta*, a bilingual teaching program (that died a couple of years later), a cross-age tutoring program and the Minischool.

The latter arose with discussion on the staff that a school of 500 kids was too big—that we should be aiming to split into smaller units, with a group of teachers consistently working with those kids. I should say at this point that the usual secondary school in Victoria contains around 800 students (the range would be 300 to 1300).

A group of teachers set up a 'trial' subschool of about 40 kids (4 teachers) in some rooms at the rear of the school. This is still operating—I taught in it last two terms last year. It works on an informal basis, with a lot of cross-age mixing of kids from form 1 to form 6.

In the following year, a church hall some distance from the main school came available, and we proposed another cross-age group of about 70 students. That was Lynall Hall. At the same time, Sydney Road Community School transferred to us from a school about a mile north (it had been going for about four years as an annexe of that school), and some flats were converted for use by the senior section of what was now a co-educational Brunswick East High School. Confused? Geographically, the pedagogic picture of Brunswick is:



- 1: Sydney Road Community School  
2: The Minischool  
3: The "Mainschool"  
(the diagram is about a quarter mile square)
- 4: The "Flats"—senior section of the mainschool  
5: Lynall Hall

I've gone into a bit of detail to show Lynall Hall in the context of a 'multi-campus' school.

Kids coming to Brunswick East High School thus have a choice between four different schools, varying in size and formality, from the rather rigid and age divided 'main school' through to the small and very mixed Minischool.

Lynall Hall sits in the middle of that range somewhere. We see ourselves as being something of a 'neighbourhood school', principally taking kids from the eastern end of Brunswick East's zone (kids must attend the nearest high school in the state). However, we have found it difficult to persuade many parents that a school with a higher degree of freedom than normal, and housed in an old church hall, is the thing for twelve year olds. Thus our junior intake is small (varies between 2 and 12) and we pick up kids at middle and senior levels.

We have kids from form 1 (year 7 at school) to form 6 (year 12—the pre-tertiary education year). Within the school, we operate at present four groups (though that varies according to need—last year it was five)—a junior, middle, 'transitional' and senior group. Kids are grouped in these by a mixture of age, choice, self-selected ability and friendship. Though they can be roughly characterised on traditional form levels (e.g. the one I mainly take—the T group—is of

3rd-4th-5th form kids but could enable any to move to a formal sixth form the next year, depending on agreement on readiness for those studies) membership is easily negotiable and transferrable.

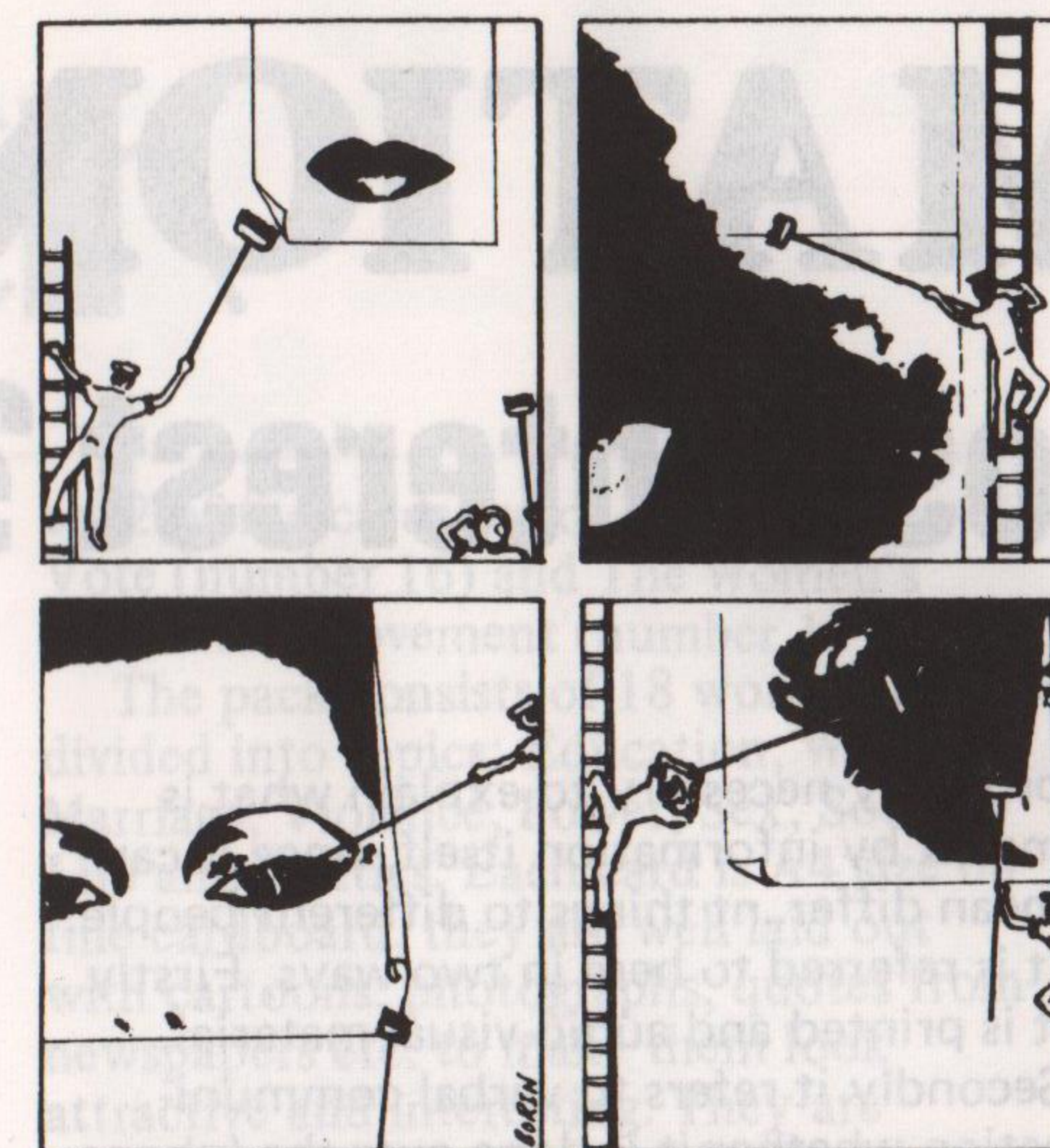
Roughly two thirds of the week is spent in these home groups, on a core of English, Humanities, Mathematics and Science, then the rest of the week is in mixed age groups for studying Current Affairs, Survival Skills and electives. That particular structure may well be transitional, as it has moved from a totally elective based program initially and is constantly under internal discussion and challenge from staff and students.

A weekly whole-school meeting is the basic decision-making body though in practice homegroups and an after-school business meeting tend to make the more down-to-earth decisions. Kids chair the meetings, sometimes ruthlessly, sometimes chaotically, sometimes with a great deal of humour. Too many teachers still speak at them. Older kids tend to say more than younger kids. We're working on that.

In terms of curriculum, we try basically to get kids involved in *doing* things. I suppose that wouldn't mean much difference from many other schools, particularly in class-room methods. But we might have kids out doing interviews with old people in the area, about their memories of the depression, others putting together a radio program for a community radio station, others compiling a directory for school leavers, others learning photography at the Brunswick Unemployed Group—while others complete fairly straight assignments on black-white conflict in Australia or even on sines and cosines. (And those examples are taken from my Tuesday afternoon session only.)

Lesson content tries to stress current political issues in an historical context and is based (from the teachers' point of view) on principles of opposition to racism and sexism, promotion of understanding of the role of the working class, and the need for community support. We've never really tried to write down a tight political statement of our beliefs, but staff have come together round a generally progressive position—but I dare say that would cover quite a range of orthodox and unorthodox views between us.

Our sixth form is a member of a group called the Schools Sixth-Form and Tertiary-Entrance Certificate Group. This contains 11 schools who are operating sixth form courses outside the official and externally examined Higher School Certificate. The STC Group operates on principles of non-competitive assessment, and work-experience as part of the courses. (These principles also characterise all levels at Lynall Hall.) Students completing the year negotiate entry to tertiary institutions and careers and have, over the past 2-3 years of operation of the group, done extremely well in gaining selection to



further study. The STC Group has done much to upset the hierarchical examination system in this state, and changes to be brought in in 1981 officially recognise the existence of school based, non-examined sixth form courses. Hardly the revolution, but a considerably freeing and broadening step.

If asked to characterise Lynall Hall briefly, I'd have to talk of student participation (as distinct from control) in their education, and of a school that attempts to confront kids with the consequences of their decisions and actions. It would be interesting to see if other staff and students agreed with that.

How come Lynall Hall exists, and is now in its 4th year, and going strong? Is the Victorian education system a liberal and innovative one?

Hardly. There are many elements that place it in the Dark Ages. A booklet 'Young, Gay and Proud' has just been banned by the Minister (with no discussion of course); teachers are being declared 'in excess' and moved against their wishes; the Education Department refuses to negotiate over issues like class-sizes, teacher allotments etc (we have just had a 2-day state-wide strike over that); teachers are sacked for the consequences of participating in political rallies; and so on. In other words, it is a traditionally, typically reactionary and inhuman department.

But somehow, in a way I don't fully understand, there have been chinks forced.

A lot follows on the decision by a Director of Education (the non-political head of the Department) in the late 1960s to devolve curriculum autonomy to schools. While the Department has attempted continually to win this back, through such schemes as the Essential Skills Assessment Program, and has anyway interpreted the devolution as being to *Principals* of schools, enough dispersion of authority has happened to enable schools to diversify remarkably.

But more importantly, active secondary teacher unions (the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association in particular), have ensured that industrial and curriculum changes have been made. For example, a threatened boycott of teaching HSC classes led to the loosening of the structure of external examinations.

Of course, those changes could only occur, and ultimately be tolerated, in the right economic climate. High unemployment at the moment has both changed the nature of the secondary schools and meant that they become less important in job training. The existence of elite private schools is a guarantee of the continuation of a trained ruling class. But we also notice now an increasing attack on the state school system—the failures of the economy are being shifted to the schools yet again. This may well mean further attacks upon the very existence of such schools as Lynall Hall.

Thus it is pleasing to note that the changes in structure and ways of relating to kids that have been pioneered in the small schools often annexed to larger institutions, are beginning to permeate back into other schools, and that more and more are starting to sub-divide into sub-schools, autonomous units, etc. Not all operate on the basis of students participating in the running of the schools, but there seems some inevitability in the process.

Finally, I just want to say that I don't wish to leave the impression we think we have *The*, or even *An*, answer. We're constantly looking at what we're doing with a critical eye. We're constantly waking up at night worried. We're constantly exhausted and hassled. But we feel much more commitment to Lynall Hall and that sort of school, than if we were buried within a huge and anonymous institution. Hopefully, the kids feel the same way. They tell us they do.

Roger Holdsworth.





# INFORMATION

## in whose interest?

This article is intended to provide an overview of current access to information for community groups. It deliberately does not attempt to discuss freedom of information, effects of new technology on information, the politics of community action or government funding of community groups. We hope that contributions will be forthcoming on any of the issues this article raises.

There has been an enormous growth of community groups over the last decade, and along with them the establishment of national and regional networks, associations and agencies, all attempting to exchange information and keep abreast of what is going on. The community groups I refer to are those who are working whether voluntarily or as paid workers in a neighbourhood context with the aim of enabling people in those neighbourhoods to take greater control over their own lives. Examples of the issues of greatest concern in these neighbourhoods tend to be housing, employment, social security, child care, play facilities and of course the racism and sexism which cut across these issues. Many community groups have grown up spontaneously, others have been "helped along" by paid workers. Inevitably the creation of such groups leads members to identify hitherto unidentified needs such as skills in literacy and numeracy, public speaking, book keeping and group organisation.

The range and intensity of activity varies from one area of the country to another. Areas of greatest "disadvantage" clearly tend to produce greater numbers of community groups. Some of the networks are listed here to indicate the nature of the activity: *Papers Everywhere*, *National Tenants Association*, *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers*, *Association of Community Artists*, *City Farm Movement*, *National Federation of Neighbourhood Advice Centres*, *Community Communications Group*, *Association of Community Workers*, *Student Community Action*.

The immense problems facing community groups to search out information relevant to their needs, to remain in contact with one another nationwide and to exert influence through their networks are caused by fragmentation of information sources, financial difficulties, fluctuating memberships and geographical isolation.

Before outlining current access to community activist information, it is

probably necessary to explain what is meant by information itself, since it can mean different things to different people. It is referred to here in two ways. Firstly it is printed and audio-visual material. Secondly it refers to verbal communication whether it is done over the 'phone, at a conference or in a meeting. More concretely the information consists of hard data (details of courses, conferences, statistics, legislation, government programmes, sources of funding); resources (where to obtain equipment and materials); technical information (eg how to use video, produce a community newspaper); administrative information (eg how to organise meetings, do the books, seek funding, obtain charity status), case studies (how a project took shape, problems which arose, benefits and spin-off); research material (implications and strategy for the future).



How then can anyone interested or active in community organisation find out what they need to know? The sources of information at present are very poorly communicated. The task can appear daunting not to say expensive in terms of time, postage and telephone calls.

Attempts to make information exchange about community activities round the country a reality are not new. However setting up a clearing house type

of information service requires a high level of commitment, stability and support and these are generally in short supply. A number of services are cited here as examples of attempts to provide information exchange. Around 1973 *BIT* information service was trying to implement a constantly updated Ideas-Pool Directory. Not long after Nicholas Saunders got together with others the famous *Alternative England and Wales. Ways and Means*—a directory of alternative information was produced by *Student Community Action* and will shortly be updated. The *Directory of Social Change* has several volumes, one of which *Community* is a useful reference book though there are updating problems. An interesting guide to some initiatives taken within local communities is *Animation Projects in the U.K.* (1976). Clearly the necessary, constant updating of such directories is something more difficult to organise without a stable investment. *Quest* was a clearing house operating in the mid 70s from Birmingham for a while and likewise the *Community Arts and Media Information Service* in Leicester which was forced to close on financial grounds only this year. Information services currently attempting to redress the balance in favour of making community activist information available are the *Trade Union Community Resources and Information Centre*, *Govan Area Resource Centre*, *The Future Studies Centre*, *The Community Education Training Unit* and the *Community Projects Foundation*. However these can only act within their own specialisms, specific user groups and geographic areas.

The number of neighbourhood information and advice centres now amounts to about 300 as opposed to about 6000 library service points. A community information project sponsored by the *Library Association* has just published a guide to information, training and campaigning materials for information and advice workers under the title of *Know How*. The guide will be updated every six months and the intention is that all the information materials will be available from *Campaign Books*, a bookshop recently set up to sell publications from any voluntary organisation, campaigning group or community project. The *Neighbourhood Fact Bank* is a further information resource which is currently being piloted and is part of an action packs scheme to



**Taking Liberties, an introduction to equal rights**  
Jean Coussins  
Virago  
18 workcards £2.95

A teaching pack for boys and girls, age 13 years up, on equal rights. The kit aims to be about "equality between the sexes", which Jean Coussins defines as allowing individuals the right to choose their own life style regardless of their sex. She says in the Teachers Notes that her emphasis is on women's rights "because legally and economically women are in a worse position than men and still have many rights to win". The pack definitely demonstrates her argument looking at women at work and opportunities for girls leaving school.

She puts the feminist viewpoint,

### Information—in whose interests?

*continued*

encourage public participation in planning, housing, and other local issues.

These recent developments do not mean that the situation is by any means adequate when access points for borrowing and acquiring such materials are so limited, and commitment to community activist information, though beginning to be fashionable, is extremely patchy. Community groups, if they wish to be informed, are obliged to be aware of a whole range of information sources. These are merely categorised here to indicate where community groups might look. However it must be stressed that some of the sources listed below do not exist in every area by any means and also vary in quality of service.

1. Neighbourhood information and advice centre, community resource centre.
2. Local voluntary organisations eg *Council of Voluntary Service*, *Community Relations Commission*.
3. Community/alternative newspaper and local media.
4. Individuals and groups eg. pressure groups, community workers, researchers.
5. Local and regional networks eg *Association of Community Artists*, *Student Community Action*.
6. Local authority: district, city and county councils.
7. Local public reference library, citizens advice bureau.

eg. 2 of the cards are on Winning the Vote (number 16) and The Women's Liberation Movement (number 17).

The pack consists of 18 workcards divided into topics: Education, Work, Marriage, Violence, Power, Sex, Social Life and Politics. Each card is A4 size on fine cardboard, they are well laid out with cartoons, photographs, quotes from newspapers etc. to make them look attractive and interesting. They are mostly written in a reasonably easy-to-read style, with follow-up questions, topics for discussion and suggested projects for students to do.

With the pack comes a booklet for teachers, which contains suggestions for using the pack, pointing out that the cards could be used individually. There is also a useful list of addresses for further more detailed information for

8. National and regional voluntary organisations eg *Peoples News Service*, *Self-Help Housing Resource Library*, *National Youth Bureau*, *Student Community Action Resource Programme*, *Community Education Training Unit*, *Future Studies Centre*.
9. Publications ie directories and journals eg *In the Making*, *Peoples News Service*, *Association of Community Workers Bulletin*, *National Council of Social Service News Service*, *Community Action*, *Youth in Society*, *Undercurrents*, *Counter Information Services*.

Despite this long list there is no doubt that the circulation of community activist information is severely constrained. This is compounded by the prevailing lack of experience in information handling. People accept that they cannot find certain things out nor get hold of the necessary book, probably on account of the numerous poor experiences they have had. Yet if community groups are to develop their ideas, their skills and their confidence, then information should be made consistently accessible and training in the basics of searching out and using the information required is of vital importance.

Although the banner of community information has been taken up by a number of agencies, including the *Library Association*, and expression of this interest has manifested itself by numerous conferences, working parties and research projects, the amount of financial investment which has been secured to ensure that community groups have access to

anyone choosing to do projects on any of the topics.

We have used them with 14-15 year olds in a progressive Leicestershire comprehensive school with great success. Another teacher uses them regularly with 12-13 year olds, in another Leicestershire comprehensive school, and finds them invaluable as both a source of information and also for interesting suggestions for other work. For example: card no. 12 (on Power) under projects: 1. Watch the News on TV: How many women do you see on film when business, politics, industry or foreign affairs is being reported?

or Education, card no. 1: Make an exhibition of photos, pictures, writing or stories showing the differences between girls' and boys' education.

There are lots of other good ideas; I've just chosen these at random to illustrate the point that these suggestions for follow-up work from students don't just involve the students in sitting and writing, but require them to go out and gather the information from the world around them and from their own experience.

Caroline Moles

the information they require is tiny. Furthermore, the type of information acquired tends to revolve round welfare rights and benefits. Examples of information services genuinely attempting to be accountable to their local neighbourhoods are unknown, though centres such as *Cardiff Community Concern* and *Islington Bus Company* provide responsive services.

The situation is therefore very unsatisfactory. Fragmentation of information resources and a complete absence of community control are issues which merit wide discussion. New technology is now available to cope with many of the problems of access to information, but local accountability has to be developed if community information is going to mean anything to those it purports to serve.

Anne Davies

*On pages 15&16 we have published a list of useful contacts, many of these are referred to in this article.*



# Decodifying Freire

## PART TWO

### Dialogical education

Freire's diagnosis of the state of oppression, especially when read in the context of his insistence on a *praxis*—an integration of reflection and action—implies a revolutionary commitment. For reasons intrinsic to his concept of the revolutionary process, he does not blueprint the society which he hopes for, though its attachment to freedom is very clear. Though he draws much from Marxism he could hardly be called an orthodox Marxist, and it seems that he has not attached himself to any revolutionary group or party. He is an educator, not a propagandist—but for him education is a revolutionary cultural activity.



A political revolution is often thought of as the overthrow of a government and the taking of power by another group which represents a different section of society. Freire does not envisage a revolution in which this does not happen, though he does point out that there are ways in which it can happen which are not revolutions, but mere coups—'unless it liberates it is not a revolution.' He insists, however, that 'the taking of power is only one moment—no matter how decisive—in the revolutionary process'; and it is this *process* which 'undeniably has an educational nature', that he is concerned with. It is a process which *must* begin before 'the revolution' and continue afterwards. As a process, it is evolutionary as well as revolutionary and has its growing-points within the present state of oppression.

This point of view is relevant to what I would say is a kind of defeatism that is often expressed about educational action:

the feeling that, because of the dependence of the educational system on the values of the controlling elites, no real change is possible until we have a new society. As Freire writes: 'but if the implementation of a liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none, how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution? ... One aspect of the reply is to be found in the distinction between *systematic education*, which can only be changed by political power, and *educational projects* which should be carried out by the oppressed.' The imperative is significant. Not only is this possible, but it is necessary since otherwise the revolution would have to be carried out *for* the people—not *with* the people—and that would be to impose it on them. 'Not even the best intentioned leadership can bestow independence as a gift. The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of men, not things. Accordingly, while no man liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others.' The substitution in this sentence of the word 'educate' for 'liberate' retains an important truth.

The pedagogy of the oppressed, then, is essentially a partnership for liberation, and because dialogue amongst those engaged in it is its essential medium, Freire describes this kind of education as 'dialogical'. But this does not mean that it is simply a matter of theoretical talk, for both sides of the *praxis*—considering *and* acting—are necessary: one-sided, and we slide towards either mere activism or mere verbalism, into objectivism (which projects a world without people) or subjectivism (which assumes people without the world). The oppressed need to rise from their 'submergence in reality', and this requires reflection on their existential experience, so that they come to perceive the reality of oppression 'not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform'—which in turn implies that they do engage in acts of transformation of their world.

This kind of education differs at all points from that which Freire labels the banking concept of education, or anti-dialogical. It differs in its purposes, in its conception of knowledge, in the relationships it rests on, and in its method.

I shall try to sketch the differences under these four heads.

The purpose of dialogical education is liberation: through the process of emerging critical consciousness, the student comes to a realization of his/her powers with others to transform, to create, to become the *subject* of his/her own history. The banking concept aims at preserving the domination of the ascendant elites by casting students into the role of passive receivers of a mythicised world to which they have to fit themselves. They are led to see themselves as the objects of history whose role is to serve and support the society which has evolved through the wisdom of its leaders to its present mythically just and considerate state.

These purposes are reflected in the contrasting concepts of knowledge. Antidialogical education transmits pre-selected knowledge, organized, compartmentalized and pre-valued. Because of its permanent, unrelated and fragmented character it cannot be used, and is not intended to be used, by the students as a tool for transformation. If it is to be used at all, it is to do things with that other people are already doing. Dialogical education on the other hand is concerned with 'acts of cognition' rather than transferrals of information, and knowledge is conceived of as a quality of consciousness—students are called upon to *get to know*, not just to memorize. The value of knowledge is seen in the extent to which it enables students to build a consciousness of themselves in the world and an ability to transform their world. Its value is therefore not absolute but is related to the students' circumstances. Nor is knowledge a commodity in the sense of being out-there and transferable: it has both objective and subjective aspects. In its objective aspect, knowledge is a representation of some part of the external world: but the cognition of this representation alters the relation of the Subject—the person who gets to know—to the world. So the act of cognition is a dynamic between a view of the world and a view of viewing the world.

This recognition of the subjective and objective nature of knowledge (which parallels the central concept of *praxis*) has a fundamental influence on

the view of the part people must play in revolutionary action and, of course, on the relationships within a dialogical education which is a part of that action. Antidialogical teachers come to the situation with 'knowledge to narrate' to their passive and 'ignorant' students and, however benignly they may act, their role is therefore an authoritarian one. They are depositors, prescribers, domesticators. Liberating education, on the other hand, consists of shared acts of cognition, and therefore depends on dialogical relations without which a co-operation in perceiving the same cognizable object would be impossible. This 'first of all demands a resolution of the teacher-student contradiction.'

The resolution is to be based in the first place on the objectives of the education—the fact that liberation is the aim implies that there can be no monopoly of authority. Secondly, it is based on the view of knowledge outlined above which implies that there is not one person already equipped with knowledge which s/he teaches to others who lack it. All those involved in the process are involved to learn, and all may teach. So Freire writes of teacher-students and student-teachers 'who become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of freedom*, not *against* it. Here no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by cognizable objects.'

The third basis of relationship, without which the other two are untenable, is the trust which the participants must have in each other. Only with trust can you properly desire the freedom of others, and without trust you cannot enter into a learning dialogue with them. Trust cannot exist where there are assumptions of ignorance and inferiority, assumptions which imply the need to instruct and to prescribe, or with more benign intentions, to 'liberate' and to 'help'. Trust carries a confidence in mutual help and joint liberation, as well as a confidence that people can handle their own freedom, can order their own knowledge, can transform their own lives. In fact if they were not so capable we could not talk of freedom, knowledge and living.

What then is the role of the teacher-student in these circumstances? This may become clearer as one looks at the method which Freire is suggesting for these educational encounters. It is a method which he developed for adult literacy programmes and is naturally applicable just in those contexts, but the general principles behind it are more widely relevant.

Freire refers to this method as 'problem-posing'. In the first stage, all those involved in the project, teacher-student and student-teachers, confer in constructing the agenda or curriculum. This is not a matter that can be decided in advance by the teacher

or by more distant 'experts'—examiners or curriculum developers or text-book writers, who make their decisions on the basis of what they consider important or even on what they think is likely to be of interest in the light of their experience of similar groups in the past. It is an essential part of the learning (of all participants) which can only then become co-intentional, and it is an essential preliminary in which the necessary horizontal relationships can begin to be built. Already in this stage the dialogue has begun out of which the themes of concern are to be identified—generative themes, in the sense that they are likely to generate ideas and further themes beyond their original definition. Thus the curriculum is organic, and it is embedded from the start in the existential experience of those involved.

In the next stage the teacher-student prepares 'codifications' of the themes that have emerged—in the literacy programmes which Freire describes these codifications were pictorial, but they might use any of the available media. This is a movement from concrete experience to abstraction, but it is not a *reduction* to the abstract. The learning process is characterized by a series of such dialectical elements: the

concrete and the abstract, reflection and action, fragmentary perception and integrating conception, subjective experience and objective reality ... And the learning is not achieved by the reduction of any one of these poles to its complement, but by a dialectical interplay. So a theme is likely to be expressed in subjective and concrete terms, and in its first formulation is unlikely to be perceived in a total reality. The process of abstraction helps to counteract this subjective and fragmented consciousness but it would be equally unhelpful to leave it in this abstract state.

Hence the third stage in the process is that of decodification, a dialogical examination first of the surface structure of the presentation and then moving into its deep structure—that is, giving meanings to what is overtly apparent, and thus relating it back to the subjective and concrete, as well as forward to a more integrated apprehension of reality.

Especially in this latter part of the process the teacher-student is not in a position to predict what will be uncovered, for that will depend too much on the experience and consciousness of the

*continued on next page*





## freire continued

other participants. His/her codification is not a lesson that s/he has prepared in order to 'teach' certain points, and if s/he manipulates the process in this way the learning is likely to remain abstract, objective and unrelated: s/he will have colonized the contribution of the students, replacing the co-intentionality of the partnership with his/her own intentions. S/he will have ceased to learn and they to teach. What should be happening at this stage is that both s/he and they are moving between the abstract and the concrete, the objective and subjective; for the state of critical consciousness which is the aim is a consciousness of both objective reality and of the subjective experience of viewing that reality. Not both can be reached without a sharing of cognition—which is true dialogue; and likewise the process stops short of fulfilment if there is not also a sharing of action—which is solidarity.

### The role of the teacher

I have been trying to use Freire's writings as a very elaborate piece of codification in extracting features from it which I can make concrete in terms of my own experience of education in this country. I have indicated how it seems to me there is a parallel between Freire's description and analysis of Third World oppression and the anti-life suppression of children and adolescents in this country; how the tactics of oppression that he identifies are apparent in our own treatment of children—in particular, the cultural invasion by which we destroy the integrity of children's developing way of life; and how the education system in general follows the same anti-dialogical methods which Freire describes as the banking concept of education, and which is an important instrument for the maintenance of an anti-life culture, feeding itself back into the consciousness of new generations of educators.

To break out of this cycle is the object of revolution, and the growing-points of that revolution are to be found already with us in local actions supportive of the pro-life drives. It is true that these drives are mostly masked by the successful tactics of the oppressor, and it is only these local actions—some of which may be educational projects, and all of which have educational content—which can free them by enabling the growth of a critical consciousness which can recognize reality behind a mythicized unreality. But this consciousness can grow only very partially if education continues to be treated as something apart, insulated from society by its being based on some alien academic criteria or by the physical separation of children into boarding-schools or day classrooms. Likewise to conceive of schooling as merely a preparation for living is really another kind of isolation.

This seems to assume a close relation between school and society, but in fact it is a relation of separateness, not interaction: the preparation is an adaptation to what is represented as unalterable (and usually good). What is wanted is a dialectical relationship in which both school and society are recognized as transformable realities, with both dependencies and independencies. In particular the school could be readily adaptable to, and by, those who work in it (teachers and student students); but because the state schools are intended to be institutions of repressive control, it is unlikely that they will be allowed to become liberating agencies in this way. The growth points, as already pointed out, are educational projects, not the educational system—and amongst such projects one may look hopefully towards the struggling Free Schools.

There is a tendency, however, to regard a Free School as a mere haven, and this is to deny its full potentiality for freedom. The problem that the adult finds in this situation—what part s/he can play which does not diminish the students' freedom—is the problem posed at the beginning of this essay.



Freire's analysis makes clear that the liberating teacher cannot adapt anti-dialogical methods to his/her purposes without contradicting those purposes. S/he cannot, for instance, set out to instil in the students a revolutionary conviction without risking an increase in their dependence on him/her which would reduce their capacity for authentic revolutionary action. They, and the teacher as well, will arrive at genuine conviction only through reflection on their own experience. 'Propaganda, management, manipulation . . . cannot be the instruments of humanization.' What is required is that 'teachers and students, co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge.'

The crucial stress here is on the apprehension of reality as the object of educational effort. Too often the students themselves are made into the object of education and the educator sets out to change them in some way—to make them more diligent, or more tolerant, or more obedient, or more loving, to make them

Christian or Communist . . . whatever virtue or creed the educator her/himself embraces or thinks important. 'For the truly humanist educator and for the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them with others—not other people themselves.'

And yet the teacher him/herself is not mindless: s/he has aims, s/he knows that s/he has skills which at some point his/her students may also want to acquire, and knowledge to which s/he can provide access when and if it is wanted. The fact that s/he enters into a relationship with a group of students making no assumptions as to their innate inferiority, recognizing the fact and value of their present knowledge, respecting their mental powers which enable them to teach as well as learn and him/herself to learn as well as teach, trusting their ability to make choices and decisions and judgments and to use their freedom, laying down no pronouncement about what they ought to learn or about his/her duty to transmit knowledge to them—none of this means that such a teacher does not approach his/her work without having some generalized objectives, nor does it mean that s/he has to make a pretence of ignorance. Freedom is safeguarded by an understanding of the nature of authentic liberation and by the consequent relations and methods which are established and which recognize and utilize the aims and knowledge of both students and teachers. The process of cultural invasion ignores the aims and knowledge of the students: a dialogical approach aims for a cultural synthesis, a meeting together and a re-creation of the cultures of students and teachers.

Not infrequently aims will conflict, especially when the duality of the students—and possibly also that of the teachers too—is powerfully operative. Freire quotes the example of the revolutionary leader who finds the people, with whom he is working, aspire no further than a demand for wage increases. If the leaders limit their action to stimulating this demand they are following a mere adaptation to the people's view knowing perhaps that it will lead to little progress towards real liberation. If on the other hand they over-rule this aspiration and substitute one more far-reaching they 'fall into cultural invasion'. The resolution, in Freire's terms, lies in synthesis: 'The leaders must on the one hand identify with the people's demand for higher salaries while on the other hand they must set the meaning of that very demand as a problem.'

The difficulties which adults who decide to be 'on the side of the child' have to face are considerable, especially if they are working in an institution which is on the other side. But there are difficulties which are of internal origin: Freire discusses some of these experienced by those members of the oppressor class who join the oppressed and who inevitably bring with them the marks of their origin

including, for instance, a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want and to know. There is a constant risk of falling into a type of 'generosity' which is as harmful as the false generosity of the oppressors: truly desiring a transformation of the unjust order they believe they must be the executors of this transformation. This is as false a role for the liberating teacher as it is for the revolutionary leader because it continues to remove from the students the responsibility for their own actions and thus to reinforce their dependence. Yet the degree of trust that is necessary to resist such action may seem frightening: 'The convert . . . feels alarm at each step they the people take, each doubt they express and each suggestion they offer and attempts to impose his/her "status", remains nostalgic towards his/her origins.'

This 'nostalgia' will be reinforced by colleagues who will make him/her very conscious of his/her 'desertion' and their pressures on him/her to 're-assert authority' coupled with accusations of 'abdication' and 'irresponsibility' will always be intimidating. In my own experience, these pressures are as insistent whether one's students are adolescent or adult: the 'responsibility to be authoritarian' does not apparently decrease as the age of one's students increases. The act of naming a person a 'student' is not simply to define him/her as one who studies: it is also to categorize him/her as inexperienced, irresponsible, lazy,



always seeking to cheat, deceive, evade, and always a potential threat to the authority of the teachers and professors. And, of course, s/he is a threat when that authority is oppressive: s/he will deceive and cheat when s/he is her/himself deceived and cheated.

From the point of view of students too, liberating teachers may appear as contradictory figures in a way that may seem threatening. Though acting apparently 'on the children's side' they are still clearly adults—a part of a dominating institution, even though they may not act in a dominating way. Understandably such ambiguities are not easily accepted. Aggressive reactions are common: perhaps to test out the teachers' ambiguity or to

## Review

**Poverty and Power, the case for a political approach to development and its implications for action in the West**  
Rachel Heatley  
Zed Press in association with Returned Volunteer Action  
93 pages £1 (paper)

This is a useful little book. It is not so much that it says anything really new but that in a relatively short space it skilfully and readably rehearses the argument that the only way to view the problems of the third world is in political terms and that correspondingly the most appropriate form of action to support the underprivileged whether in underdeveloped countries or in the "first world" is political.

She does a useful job of expressing the activities of Multi National Companies and the role Capitalist countries play in the economies of underdeveloped countries and gradually works towards the conclusion that it is the nature of rich capitalist economies to rapaciously exploit underdeveloped ones—even to the extent of supplying dried milk for babies which, the firms in question knew,

would lead to a rise in the infant mortality rate.

She looks at the various volunteer groups and charitable aid distributing agencies. She points out, what many concerned people already knew, that many of the groups, such as V.S.O., send volunteers to work for governments of an unacceptable political complexion, such as Korea. Agencies such as *Action in Distress* by which benign Westerners can buy welfare and education for selected poor blacks are shown up for their tokenism and tendency to support the political status quo.

The book, not unnaturally, becomes depressing when we read the section on 'What to do about the situation?' and Rachel Heatley does little more than pose the questions of whether or not to work within the Labour Party, do community work or whatever.

It is one of the few books I would hand certain sympathetic people in the hope that it might encourage them to think a little more deeply about the reasons why the *Oxfam* literature drops on their doormat so that rather than accepting underdevelopment as an

persuade them to abandon it and be 'proper teachers', or may be to challenge the institution through them. It is difficult for teachers then not to feel resentful at being attacked by the very people who they had thought to side with. Similarly it is difficult at a later stage, when a degree of mutual trust has been established between them and the students, not to feel these students are 'letting them down' if they act in ways which appear to them irrational or misguided and whose repercussions embarrass them. Their colleagues will continue to hold them responsible for their students' behaviour, and even though they themselves may recognise intellectually the responsibility of the students for their own decisions, their feeling of being betrayed indicates that they too house the paternalism of the oppressor.

This is a part of the existential situation in which they and the students find themselves, and as such it may be proper for the teachers to pose it as a problem for them all to consider. But it is all too easy for teachers who are ready themselves to learn from the situation, to pose the problem so as to manipulate the students into behaving in ways which will no longer embarrass them. Those who work for liberation must not take advantage of the emotional dependence of the oppressed . . . using their dependence to create still greater dependence.

Ray Hemmings



inevitable fact of life they can see its root causes in the capitalism of the "first world".

Michael Gerard



# No Strings?

## STATE SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVES?

Resources quite unprecedented in recorded history are now poured into the care and instruction of young people. And yet no-one—but no-one—is satisfied with the results. Those who expect schooling to produce obedient, christian patriots are dissatisfied. Those who expect schooling to produce aware, tolerant, thoughtful democrats are dissatisfied. Those who expect schooling to produce abundant academic high-flyers are disappointed. Those who picture a well-oiled economic machine fuelled by a constant flow of well-trained labour are dissatisfied. Everyone is dissatisfied: and everyone says so. And yet nothing changes. Schools today are, apart from trivial superficialities, doing the same things in the same way as they were 50 years ago. Never has the case for experimentation been more urgent—no matter whose standards you accept. But the number of genuine educational experiments in England today can be numbered on the fingers of two hands.

Why? The answer is simple: power, money and ideology. And the greatest of these is money, because it can command the other two. Those who command resources have real power; not only power to affect events, but also, through the media, to influence the prevailing ideology. Stagnation, corruption, waste, stupidity can no longer be blamed on the fact that resources are commanded only by a tiny ruling class. That was the situation one hundred years ago. But today elected local authorities control a significant proportion of the nation's resources. And these local authorities are not controlled by hereditary aristocrats, landed gentry, or millionaire mill-owners. Many are controlled by elected members who might well be your or my next-door-neighbours. And *still* nothing changes.

There is no need here to make out a case for one particular type of experiment—the libertarian experiment of free schools. That there is a demand for it cannot be denied. Children want it. Parents want it (a recent survey in Hackney, east London, found that a surprising 20 per cent of parents would like their child to go to a free school). And professional educators want it (White Lion Street Free School gets 40 or 50 applicants for its jobs, even though the pay is little over half what a teacher could get in a state school). Yet there are pitifully few free schools in England for one reason: those who would like to have them cannot find the money.

In Denmark, and in parts of Canada, it is possible for groups of parents to set up their own school and get state funding for it. The time is right for a campaign to win a similar right for English people. There can be no case for compulsory taxation and compulsory rates to pay for a compulsory education which satisfies no-one. Those who want to join a campaign to win state support for educational alternatives will be meeting in London on 8 December to plan the campaign. The group who are organising the conference—they came together after a conference organised last year by the Advisory Centre for Education—have one particular type of alternative in mind. They will *not* be campaigning for the right of racists to set up all-white schools, nor for the right of religious zealots to set up indoctrination centres. But they will be campaigning for a school which:

- (a) democratically involves parents, children and workers;
- (b) is open to all;
- (c) is non-hierarchical;
- (d) is non-coercive and non-violent;
- (e) is small in scale.

We cannot expect miracles. No-one expects local authorities to queue up with offers of money to fund radical educational innovations. But constant pressure,

constant argument, can bring results. The recent decision of the London Borough of Islington to fund half the needs of White Lion Street Free School is of major significance. A well-organised campaign will produce similar results elsewhere. A short-term objective might be to get half-a-dozen projects off the ground in different parts of the country. In the past some ventures have achieved notoriety as their bold aspirations have collapsed from sheer lack of financial support. Properly financed, and competently organised, a handful of ventures could provide models which rapidly prove their worth. They could prove their worth to children, so many of whom *know* that ordinary schools have nothing to offer them; to parents, who know things are not right but who may not know what the alternative is; and to authorities, some of which are conscientious enough to know they are failing but have no idea what to do about it.

The 8 December conference will be for people who are ready to act, not talk. Those who, quite understandably, wish to argue that the whole thing is impossible will not be welcomed. If you think that a campaign for state support for educational alternatives is reformist nonsense, and bound to fail, please stay at home and reserve the right to say 'I told you so' when we have failed. If you think that there will be no significant change until the revolution, please get on with the revolution. But if you think we must struggle to get what we can—however little—here and now, please come to the conference. A pamphlet outlining the case for alternatives within the mainstream sector can be obtained, price 50p, from the *Advisory Centre for Education*, 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PB. Details of the conference can be obtained from the same address.

Nigel Wright



## SOME USEFUL CONTACTS

### A

Action Resource Centre  
4 Cromwell Place,  
London SW7 ZU,  
01 584 0438.

or  
7 Broughton Place,  
Edinburgh.

Arts Council Information Bulletin  
ACGB  
105 Piccadilly  
London W1V OAU

Association of Adult  
and Continuing Education  
Crossways  
Beechwood Green  
Hitchin  
Herts

Association of Community Artists  
1 Shelton St,  
London WC2.

Association of Community Workers,  
Colombo St Sports and Community Centre,  
Colombo St,  
London SE1

Association of Neighbourhood Councils &  
the Neighbourhood Trust  
P.O. Box 1  
Halstead  
Essex

### b

BIT Information Service  
118 Talbot Rd,  
London W11

British Association of Settlements and  
Social Action Centres  
7 Exton Street  
London SE1 8UE

### C

Camerawork  
119 - 121 Roman Road  
London E2

Campaign Books  
9 Rupert St.  
London W1

Cardiff Community Concern,  
58 Charles St.  
Cardiff.

Centre for Mass Communications Research  
104 Regent Road  
Leicester LE1 7LT

Childs Play  
Francis House  
Francis Street  
London SW1

This list of mainly national or regional organisations and newsletters of use to community groups is as fully comprehensive as we could make it, but if you know of any we should not have missed off, please let us know.

City Farm Movement  
c/o Inter-Action,  
15 Wilkin St,  
London NW5.

Claimants Union  
Dame Colet House  
Ben Johnson Road  
London E1

COMCOM Newsletter  
c/o Derek Jones  
8 Millfield Close  
Farndon  
Cheshire

Community Action  
P.O. Box 665  
London SW1

Community Care  
Surrey House  
Throwley Way  
Sutton  
Surrey

Community Education Training Unit  
17/21 Mumps  
Oldham I.

Community Projects Foundation  
60 Highbury Grove  
London N5 2AG

Community Work Exchange  
British Council of Churches  
2 Eaton Gate  
London SW1

Community Work Service  
London Voluntary Service Council  
68 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JR

Counter Information Services  
9 Poland St  
London W1.

### D

Directory of Social Change  
9 Mansfield Place  
London NW3

### f

Federation of Alternative  
Bookshops  
Acorn Books  
The Emporium  
Merchants Place  
Reading

Federation of Worker Writers and  
Community Publishers,  
Cambridge House Literacy Scheme,  
131 Camberwell Rd,  
London SE5.

Future Studies Centre,  
15 Kelso Rd,  
Leeds 5.

### g

Govan Area Resource Centre,  
121 Langlands Rd,  
Glasgow.

### H

House of Lambeth  
220 Farmers Road,  
Camberwell,  
London SE5,  
01 582 2767.  
Hilary Kerr.

### i

In Business for the Community  
British Institute of Management,  
Central London Branch,  
c/o Metra Consulting Ltd.,  
Lower Belgrave St.,  
London SW1,  
01 730 0855.

Industrial Common Ownership  
Movement,  
8 Sussex St.,  
London SW1,  
Tel: 01 828 2321.

Inner Cities/Self-Help Project  
Paul Curno - Co-ordinator  
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation  
98 Portland Place  
London W1

Inter Action (city farms/community arts)  
15 Wilkin Street  
London NW5

In the Making  
84 Church St,  
Wolverton  
Bucks.

Involve  
The Volunteer Centre  
29 Lower Kings Road  
Berkhamstead  
Herts

Islington Bus Company  
Palmer Place  
London N7.

### L

Legal Action Group  
28a Highgate Road  
London NW5

Leisure Studies Association Newsletter  
c/o John Haworth  
Department of Psychology  
University of Manchester  
Manchester



## L continued

Library Association,  
7 Ridgmount St,  
London WCI.

London Voluntary Service Council  
68 Chalton Street

London NW1 1JR



Minority Arts Advisory Service  
8 Halliford Street  
London N1

Minority Press Group  
Charles Landry  
David Morley  
9 Poland Street  
London W1

Mutual Aid Centre,  
18 Victoria Park Sq.,  
London E2,  
01 980 6262.



National Association of Youth Clubs  
P.O. Box 1  
Blackburn House  
Nuneaton  
Warwick

National Council of Social Service,  
26 Bedford Sq.,  
London WCI.

National Federation of  
Community Associations

26 Bedford Square  
London WC1

National Federation of  
Community Work Training  
Leo Jago  
26 Bedford Square  
London WC1

National Federation of Neighbourhood  
Advice Centres  
c/o Advice Centre in the Blue,  
190 Southwark Park Road,  
London SE16.

National Institute of Adult Education  
19b De Montfort Street  
Leicester LE1 7GE

National Tenants Association,  
189a Old Brompton Rd,  
London SW5.

National Union of School Students  
302 Pentonville Road  
London N1

National Union of Students  
302 Pentonville Road  
London N1

National Working Party of  
Young Volunteer Organisers  
Stewart Beaumont  
c/o Chesterfield Task Force  
34 - 36 Beetwell Street  
Chesterfield

National Youth Bureau,  
17/23 Albion St,  
Leicester.

Neighbourhood Fact Bank,  
Tony Gibson,  
School of Education,  
Nottingham University,  
University Park,  
Nottingham 7.



Open University Alternative  
Technology Group,  
Faculty of Technology,  
Open University,  
Milton Keynes,  
Peter Read.



Peoples News Service  
Oxford House (Papers Everywhere)  
Derbyshire St,  
London E2.

Publications Distribution  
27 Clerkenwell Close  
London EC1



Rapport  
CYSA  
Langton House  
82 Gt Bridgewater Street  
Manchester M1

Release  
1 Elgin Avenue  
London W9



Self-Help Housing Resource  
Ladbroke House,  
Library,  
Highbury Grove,  
London N5.

SHAPE  
44 Earlham Street  
London WC2

Share  
The Self-Help Clearing House  
170 Kingston Road  
Merton Park  
London SW19 3NY

Student Community Action Bulletin  
SCARP  
Oxford House  
Derbyshire Street  
London E2

Student Community Action  
Resources Programme  
Oxford House  
Derbyshire Street  
London E2  
or

Student Community Action Resources  
1st Floor, Bombay House,  
Programme,  
59 Whitworth Street, Manchester 1.

South Wales Anti-Poverty Action Group  
Bethesda Chapel  
Bethesda Street  
Merthyr Tydfil  
South Wales



Time Out  
Tower House  
Southampton Street  
London WC2E 7HD

Trades Union Community Resources  
and Information Centre  
29 Bleheim Terrace  
Leeds



Undercurrents  
27 Clerkenwell Close,  
London EC1.



Volunteer Centre  
29 Lower Kings Road  
Berkhamstead  
Herts



Workers Educational Association  
9 Upper Berkely Street  
London W1H 8BY

Writers and Readers Publishing  
Sian Williams  
Co-operative  
9 - 19 Rupert Street  
London W1



Youth in Society  
NYB  
17/23 Albion Street  
Leicester

## Reviews

**Phoenix Stories**—an anthology of children's writing, published by the **Federation of Worker Writers & Community Publishers**, 1979, available from them at: **E Floor, Milburn House, Dean Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 1LF**, price 65p (incl. p&p).

This slim, 24-page collection of children's poems, stories and drawings has been brought together in commemoration of the work of Blair Peach, the East London teacher murdered by the police at the anti-NF demonstration in Southall last April. Since his death his name and photograph have rarely been out of the news as the circumstances of the killing have been publicly debated.

Inevitably, the name of Blair Peach has come to be almost totally identified with the Southall event and his individual identity as a political activist and teacher has been overshadowed. This pamphlet does something, at least, to redress that imbalance.

The title—*Phoenix Stories*—comes from the name of a school magazine which Blair Peach and some of his fellow teachers set up in 1973. All the work in the anthology originally appeared in

issues of that magazine.

The introduction says: "It was Blair particularly who encouraged the children to write, and who got their work duplicated or printed and circulated in the local community. It was also Blair, more than anybody, who ran the small printing press at the school and who gave confidence to the children to see how their work could reach a wider audience beyond their own school exercise books."

The writing clearly reflects the preoccupations of young people growing up in East London. The girl who wants to become a nurse or designer—but is "not a very good drawer" and can't see herself passing the required exams for nursing. "My mum wants me to work on machining but I don't like that."

There are pieces about Elvis Presley, nose-parkers and football violence among others. *Royal Mint Square* recalls the pre-sum clearance days of an area now dominated by tower blocks of flats. It ends: "... now there is no talking in the skyscrapers. They just lock themselves up."

*Phoenix Stories* is a fitting memorial to a committed teacher.

Graham Wade



make sense of the disaster; or to negotiate a new meaning between them. The result is fairly predictable—"two years after the flood, Buffalo Creek was almost as desolate as it had been the day following, the grief as intense, the fear as strong, the anxiety as sharp, the despair as dark. People still looked out at the world with vacant eyes and drifted from one place to another with dulled and tentative movements. They rarely smiled and rarely played. They were not sure how to relate to one another. They were unsettled and deeply hurt"

The caravan parks have made permanent the intransigence of the people and held them back from progressing even beyond the seeking and searching associated with behaviour immediately after a disaster. The effects, as catalogued by Erikson have percolated through into every facet of the peoples lives. Many are still haunted by nightmares; others have reported losing their sex drive; most complain of "loneliness", while others are unable to go to bed when it

rains—"just in case". As Erikson notes, "most of the survivors responded to the disaster with a deep sense of loss, a nameless feeling that something had gone awry in the order of things, that their minds had been bruised beyond repair, that they would never be able to find coherence, that the world as they knew it had come to an end". And because of their biggest loss—an unnameable loss—that of communality, the people of Buffalo Creek remain silent and alone; many resorting to new identities—as sick, or "suffering with nerves" to cope with the world. In Buffalo Creek a non-strategy of help; a discouragement of understanding has frozen time.

### Conclusion

I have tried to portray disasters as explicitly human, and therefore political phenomena, rather than as the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". We need, I would contend, a decidedly political framework from which to understand them, otherwise our "help" to their victims will be literally worse than useless.

The strategy outlined here, that of conscientization, is one way of forming such a strategy. The examples of Buffalo Creek and Aberfan bear testimony to the alternatives helpers are faced with, and the choice is, I feel, a clear and simple one.

Finally it is obvious that in a society based on institutionalised risk taking and structured inequality disasters will continue, and those with least power will inevitably bear the brunt of them. As one anti-nuclear demonstrator asked recently, "if nuclear power stations are so safe why don't they build them in London

Fit for Work? Youth, School and  
(Un)employment  
Colin and Mog Ball  
Writers and Readers Publishing  
Co-operative, 1979  
131pp £1.95

I was rather put off by the obviously sexist cover—a boy's school uniform beside a pair of overalls! However, the book is written in a non-sexist way with plenty of s/he's and his/her's, and the quotes and experiences are fairly evenly split between males and females. Unfortunately, that is the only good thing I can say about the book.

The preface/introduction describes how they set about writing the book, and summarises the points it would like to raise. It sets the scene for a very interesting piece of reading which, unfortunately, never really materialises. It is full of well-worn, but dressed up, quotes from young people illustrating how ageist our society is, how stupid the school system is, and how we churn out factory fodder at such a rate that the capitalist can pick and choose the "best" leaving the "undesirable" to rot. I get the feeling that the book is about how best to "fit" these "undesirables" into the system.

It describes the government schemes and community education schemes which try to remould people from the school

continued on next page

instead of rural communities?" We must all work to help strengthen resistance to unwanted risks among those people that the authorities choose to be potential disaster victims. Otherwise after the next Flixborough or Aberfan the "powers that be" will still be able to pretend that they did not know why it happened.

John Davies

Erikson, K.T. *In the Wake of the Flood* (1979)  
Allen & Unwin

Barton, A.H. *Communities in Disaster* (1969)  
Doubleday Inc. New York

Wolfenstein, M. *Disaster* (1957) Glencoe,  
The Free Press

Mills, C.W. *The Sociological Imagination* (1970)  
Pelican Books

Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972)  
Penguin Books

Kastenbaum, R. "Disaster, Death and Human Ecology" *Omega Journal of Death and Dying* (1974) vol. 5 no. 1

Report of the Tribunal Appointed to Inquire  
into the Disaster at Aberfan on 21st October  
1966 H.M.S.O. (1967)

Miller J. *Aberfan A Disaster and its Aftermath*  
(1974) Constable

Simmecca, J.A. *Paying Homage to the Father:  
C. Wright Mills and Radical Sociology*  
*Sociological Quarterly* V. 17 Spring 1976

Perry et al *The Child and his Family in Disaster:  
A Study of the 1953 Vicksburg Tornado*  
Committee on Disaster Studies, National  
Academy of Sciences—National Research  
Council (1956)

Turner, B.A. "The Development of Disasters—  
A Sequence Model for the analysis of the  
Origins of Disasters"  
*Sociological Review* (1976)



model to the work zombie, but does little to question the whole structure of our society and doesn't present any real alternatives. They infer that the blame lies with the schools and parents—industry is hardly mentioned.

As I realised that the questions they raised in the early chapters were not going to be answered and they had nothing new to say, the book rapidly became extremely boring—I struggled with the latter half and when I came to re-read the whole book, I literally had to force myself to stop thinking about all the other things I would rather do. Not a very good buy at £1.95.

Garry Whitby

## KIDS' BOOKS

The *Children's Book Bulletin* is published by Rosemary Stones and Andrew Mann of the *Children's Rights Workshop*. It is "a new, 3 times a year journal which will provide a systematic coverage of non-sexist children's books, children's books for the multi-ethnic society and children's books which reflect the history and present day contribution of working people."

Both editions published so far maintain an excellent standard of presentation. The front of the magazine contains feature articles and news items and the remainder is given over to reviews from pre-reading books to materials for young adults, written by an impressive range of reviewers.

Topics covered in the features section have included the treatment of homosexuality in books for young people, a bibliography of books on women and society to use with teenagers and a very thorough guide to assessing racial bias in books. Materials recommended are drawn from a wide variety of sources including mainstream publishers—even some *Ladybirds*—as well as little presses such as the *Youth Liberation Press*. The current issue covers young people's published works now in print in this country and a note on where they are obtainable from.

Each review section is clearly headed, spaced and illustrated and both hardback and paperback prices are given where relevant. All the reviews are highly critical and a book not only has to satisfy a reviewer in terms of bias, but equally important it must satisfy the conventional criteria of good graphics, illustrations and story content.

The first two editions of the *Children's Book Bulletin* have been stimulating and thought provoking. I await with interest future editions in the hope that the publishers will find enough material of a similarly high standard. The magazine deserves support. Buy it from your local alternative bookseller at 40p or direct from: *Children's Rights Workshop*, 4 Aldebert Terrace, SW8.

J.W.

### CHANGING CHILDHOOD by Martin Hoyles Writers and Readers 290pp £6.50 (case) £3.25 (paper)

This is a disappointing book, pointing to an area where theory is needed, but failing to provide one. It is also a very fragmented book, both in form and in its ideas. It contains over forty articles (mostly reprints) and poems, many of the former tantalizingly brief. They range from the intimately personal ('Changing with my daughter' by Elizabeth and Ruth) to Brecht's harshly public 'The Solution':

*After the uprising of the 17th June  
The secretary of the Writers' Union  
Had leaflets distributed in the  
Stalinalee  
Saying that the people  
Had forfeited the confidence of the  
government  
And could only regain it  
By working twice as hard. Would it not  
Have been easier for the government  
To dissolve the people  
And elect another?*

An excellent poem, but I still haven't worked out what it's got to do with childhood.

There are sections on children's strikes, from Hull 1911 to Soweto, cross-cultural perspectives, and 'The Child in English and Maths', the last two bearing the brunt of the inevitable discussion of Freud and Piaget. I found the poems by Brecht the most interesting, but then you can get those elsewhere too.

A fundamental contradiction occurs between the first two sections of the book, in which Martin Hoyles, Shulemith Firestone and others seek to show how childhood is ultimately the product of social practice, and Peter Fuller claims that it is a biological entity. Despite using a form similar to that of John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing', Peter Fuller's conclusions call into question the validity of a pictorial essay of this type. He suggests that we cannot approach past societies' understanding of childhood via contemporary pictures, far less the experience of children in the past. The pictures represent not what childhood was thought to be, nor what it was, but what some people wanted it to be or wished it had been.

According to Fuller, the state of childhood has not been invented by the bourgeoisie but rather uncovered by it, though of course not fully. That's up to the proletariat, I suppose. Far from seeking to abolish childhood, he continues, we should realise and celebrate it. He condemns the lack of social space for childhood in modern China, for example.

Fuller seeks to put the vulgarity back into popular Marxism by giving it a grounding in an unproblematical natural science and asserting the biological unavoidability of childhood. Yet he is

surely wrong in the analogy between the sperm, which was not invented by being identified for the first time in the 17th century, and childhood. A sperm is a sperm, but childhood... at its simplest it can be described as an ideological formation, something in which consciousness of its existence is of great importance. What Fanon has to say about the negro is closer to the case in point; there were black men and women before colonialists saw them, but not negroes.

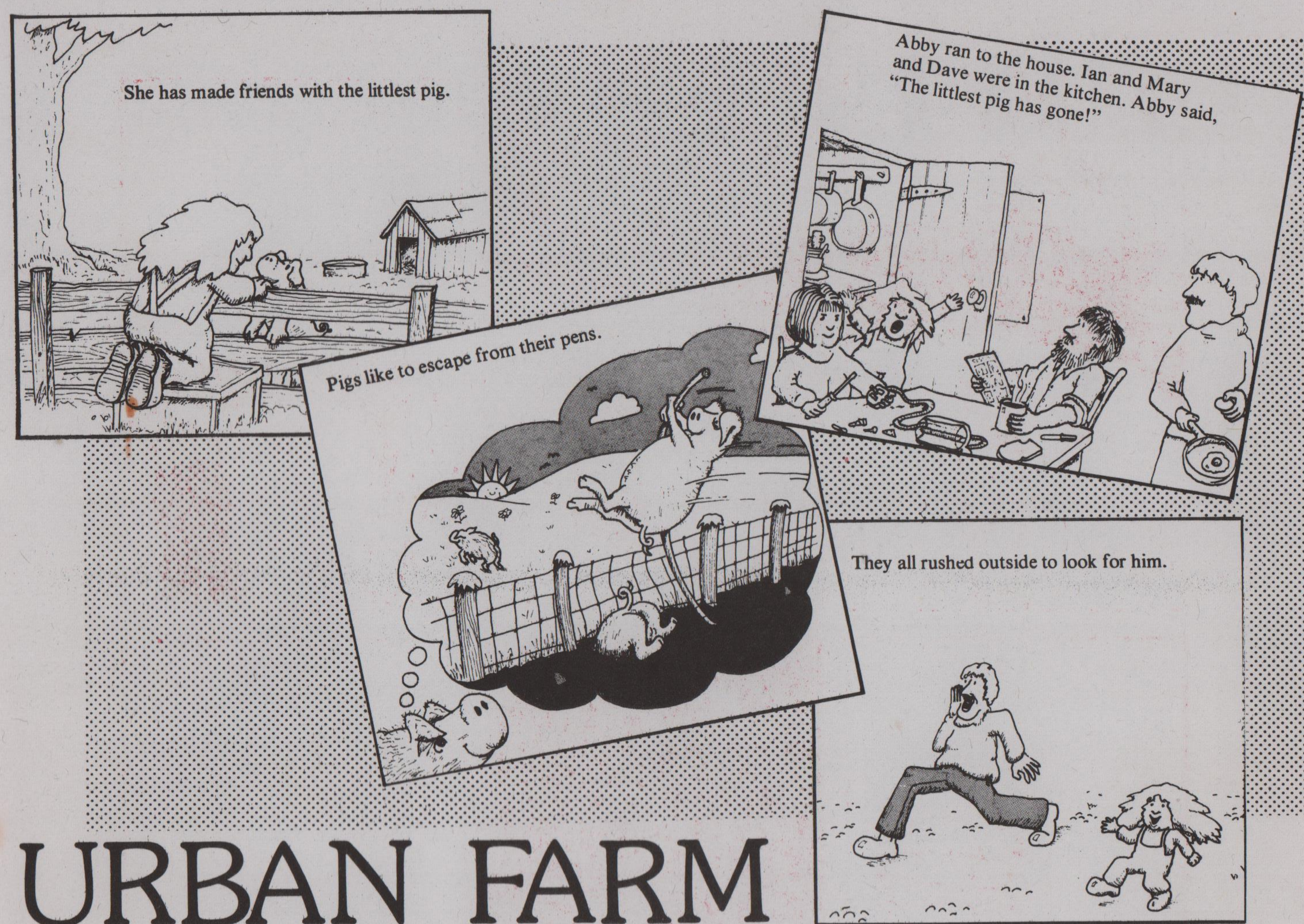
Unfortunately, there is no editorial recognition of this clash of interpretations. One doesn't expect unanimity in an anthology, but pluralism can be more than one person saying 'Yes', another 'No' and leaving it at that.

Forced to come to a synthesis, and more precisely to suggest the area of interest opened up by this book, one would have to accept with Fuller that childhood is in some sense a biological state, but that the way that state affects social practice is almost infinitely variable. Nor is it something which progressively 'emerges', along with the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Childhood inevitably involves some sort of dependence, but for how long and in what way is very variable. Nor is it easy to see how there could be any ideal state of childhood awaiting discovery. Seen in this light, 19th century legislation concerning the employment and later the education of children will not be seen as the gradual 'acknowledgement of childhood in the laws and institutions of the state' (Fuller), the great achievement of bourgeois science. Rather they are the result of the demands of a developing capitalism for a smaller and more highly differentiated workforce, and of the crisis of confidence of a ruling elite aware of the dangerous gap between its Christian ideology and its practice.

Does childhood change? Certainly. Can we, or children themselves, change it? Soweto and China suggest ways in which it might be done. This passage from Itty Chan's article on 'Early Education in China' also provides a lesson of what not to do:

*'One day on the street, Ku Mi (a five-year-old girl) saw a police-woman leading a crying child by the hand. "Why is that girl crying?" she asked her father. "She has lost her way, and this aunt (the police-woman) is helping her to find her mother." Back at home Ku Mi made a drawing of what she had seen, at first with lots of tears streaming down the child's cheek... "Why all those waterworks?" the father asked. "Does she need to be sad, if she thought about the police auntie being there to help her look for her mother?" Ku Mi thought for a while, removed the tears and drew the girl with wide open eyes.'*

C.P.



## URBAN FARM

Well, let's not make any bones about it—this is an advert to encourage you to write off for, or harass your local bookshop for our new Garthdee Farm book—because we need to sell all 2000 to make small scale publishing a practical activity as well as worthwhile. Meanwhile here is some of the background.

Garthdee Farm is the home of the people involved in the book—it is situated on the edge of one of Aberdeen's housing estates and is 6 acres of town planning anomaly. Eight of us live here, all involved, to different extents in looking after the animals and garden, and this year our field of oats and tatties. We have been steadily expanding as a small holding for the last few years, although for the last 18 months this has been under the shadow of an eviction struggle against a landlord who is using every loophole in the Rent Act to evict us—so far we're still legally entitled to be here but the courts are a costly, time-consuming and uncertain business. Anyway enough of our troubles except to say that the farm's other line of defence is favourable public opinion. We hope the book will contribute to that. It seems crazy that while other towns are struggling to set up city farms we are having to fight in Aberdeen to protect one that is already functioning. Right now we seem to have pretty good local support: 500 people came to open day. The local Headmistress is very friendly—she gave us help with the book and the school

took several copies. Also the local kids organised a petition to keep the farm.

Where do the kids fit into the farm? Well, they seem to like the place—a lot come around—it's a place to hang about in and there are things going on. Kids come up asking for jobs to do, collecting eggs, help a bit with milking the goats, feed the pigs etc. and other kids get involved in digging and planting—they seem to like it. What I like about it is that it isn't a kids' project—work is going on here anyway and they lend a hand—things aren't laid out for them, it's our home not a youth club.

Somehow this gives me a much better relationship with the kids than I ever got in my brief encounter with teaching and community work.

Farming is one of the last adult jobs to be withdrawing from children's experience. Factories have been closed a long time and as farms become bigger with more dangerous and expensive equipment—another barrier is erected and kids lose touch with basic processes of food and life.

Some local kids who moved to the country were back visiting recently and Nicola was saying "There's a farm up the road but the manny chases you away." Well we chase the kids away but mostly they just come and go.

When it came to writing a book (which I suppose was inevitable, there was an illustrator, a budding author, and a community printer all in the same house) the

obvious choice of subject was the farm but it also seemed a good subject. We were all dissatisfied with the rubbish kids usually get and with how removed it usually is from their own lives. Here was a chance to portray a real situation that even if it wasn't completely non-sexist was at least less so than most situations.

A living situation that wasn't a nuclear family and a book about animals and the countryside that wasn't romanticised—though I don't think we avoided all the pitfalls of the human farm animals stereo type—but then we haven't worked that out on the farm either. What I was thankful about as an illustrator was that it was possible to put in these themes without forcing them in because it's based on a real place.

This localness seems important in kids books for although we're distributing it nationally the important sales are local and I hope lots of people get more and more local publishing on this scale. (Free advice to anyone having a go).

This seems an awful lot to say about a wee kids story, in fact it's finally happened—there's more words in this review than in the book.

Dave

Garthdee Farm, the farm in the city is available from Garthdee Writers' Co-op, Garthdee Farm, Garthdee, Aberdeen or from alternative bookshops, priced 60p.