

Groups and Resources

Lib ED contacts

Leicester 0455-209029
Bristol 0272-241380
Nottingham 0949-60306 (distribution and subs)

Liberation Network of People with Disabilities
c/o Townsend House, Green Lanes, Marshfield,
Chippenham, Wilts.

Lesbian and Gay Freedom Movement
LGFM, BM Box 207, London WC1N 3XX
(Advice, Penfriends, Liberation!)

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

National Union of Students
461 Holloway Road, London N7
01-272 8900

Letterbox Library
8 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN
01-254 1640
(Specialises in non-sexist and multi-cultural books
for children. For details of their free catalogue, write
or phone)

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

Woodcraft Folk
13 Ritherton Road, London SW17
01-672 6031
(A kind of non-sexist, non-militarist scouts and
brownies)

Anti-Apartheid Movement
13 Mandela Street, London NW1 0DW
01-387 7966

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

**Campaign Against Military Research On
Campus (CAMROC)**
190 Burdett Road, London E3 4AA
01-980 2455

New Education Directory
15 Bellevue, Clifton, Bristol BS8 1DB
0272-735091

Shocking Pink
Young Women's Magazine Collective, c/o 55 Acre
Lane, Brixton, London SW2
(A 4 issue sub to this excellent magazine costs £2.40)

Anarchist Student/Bete Noire
Box A, 34 Cowley Road, Oxford
(Student magazine)

**All London Teachers Against Racism and
Fascism**
Panther House, Room 216, 38 Mount Pleasant,
London WC1

Bread'n'Roses/Tenants Corner
46a Oval Mansions, Vauxhall St., London SE11
01-582 7286
(housing & education resource centre run by tenants)

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

Advisory Centre for Education
18 Victoria Park Square, London E2
01-980 4596

Minority Rights Group
29 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG
01-930 6659

Peace Education Project
Peace Pledge Union, 6 Endsleigh Street, London
WC1
01-387 5501

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

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

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

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

Black and In Care
20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN
01-226 7102

**International Association for the Child's Right
to Play**
Paul Soames, UK Branch Secretary IPA,
Contact-a-Family, 15 Strutton Ground, London
SW1P 2HP

Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project
Wyvil Road School, Wyvil Road, London SW8
01-627 2662

Teachers for Animal Rights
c/o Wanda Dejlikdo, 29 Lynwood Road, London
SW17 8SB

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

National Union of Teachers
Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1
01-388 6191

Children's Legal Centre
20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN
01-359 6251

**The Children's Home-Based Education
Association**
14 Basil Avenue, Armthorpe, Doncaster, DN3 2AT
0302-833596

Daycare Trust
Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU

A K Distribution
3 Balmoral Place, Stirling, FK8 2RD

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

Kilquhanity House School
Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland

University of the Third Age
Wren Street, London WC1
01-833 4747
(Self-help learning groups for older people)

Blackcurrent Otherwise Project
132 St James Park Road, Northampton, NN5 5EL

Skool Bus Project
24 Clive Street, Hereford, HR1 2SB

International

**National Coalition of Alternative
Community Schools**
RDI Box 378, Glenmore, PA 19343, USA
tel:(215) 458 5138

City as School
16 Clarkson Street, New York, NY 10014, USA

Foundation of Education with Production
PO Box 20906, Gaborone, Botswana
(Education for social change)

ANKUR
J-21, Hauz Khas Enclave, New Dehli 110016, India
tel:661473
(Society for alternatives in education)

Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Vidyalaya
Sawai Ram Singh Road, Jaipur-302 004, India

Tamariki Free School
Woolston, Christchurch, New Zealand

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

SAC (Syndikalisterna)
Svenvagen 98, 113 50 Stockholm, Sweden
tel: 08-34-35-59

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

Frankfurt Free School
Vogelweidstrasse 3, Frankfurt, W. Germany

Familial, Day Nursery Kindergarten School
PO Box 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal

Le CERISE
77 rue des Haies, 75020 Paris, France
(Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Innovation
Sociale et Educative, which publishes the journal
"Zero de Conduite")

Graine d'Ecole
La Paillerie, Avenue de Bardenac, 33600 PESSAC,
France

Circule-Air
Agence Informations Enfance, 29 rue Davy, 75017
Paris, France
tel: (1) 42-28-71-64
(an alternative education organisation and
magazine)

Assn. Nationale pour l'Education Nouvelle
1 rue des Neffiers, 31400 Toulouse, France
tel: 61-52-45-10

Connect
12 Brooke St., Northcote 3070, Victoria, Australia

Acrobatic Arts Community School
PO Box 1101, Wodonga 3690, Australia

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

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

CNT-Federacio d'Ensenyament de Catalunya
c/Roger de Lluria, 123 pral, 08037 Barcelona,
Spain
tel: 215-7625 (English spoken Tuesday mornings)
(They publish "Alternative Teacher" (in English),
news for foreign language teachers.)

Jiyu No Mori Gakuen
Hanno, Saitama, Japan

Grupo Impulso Libertario
CC984, 2000 Rosario, Argentina

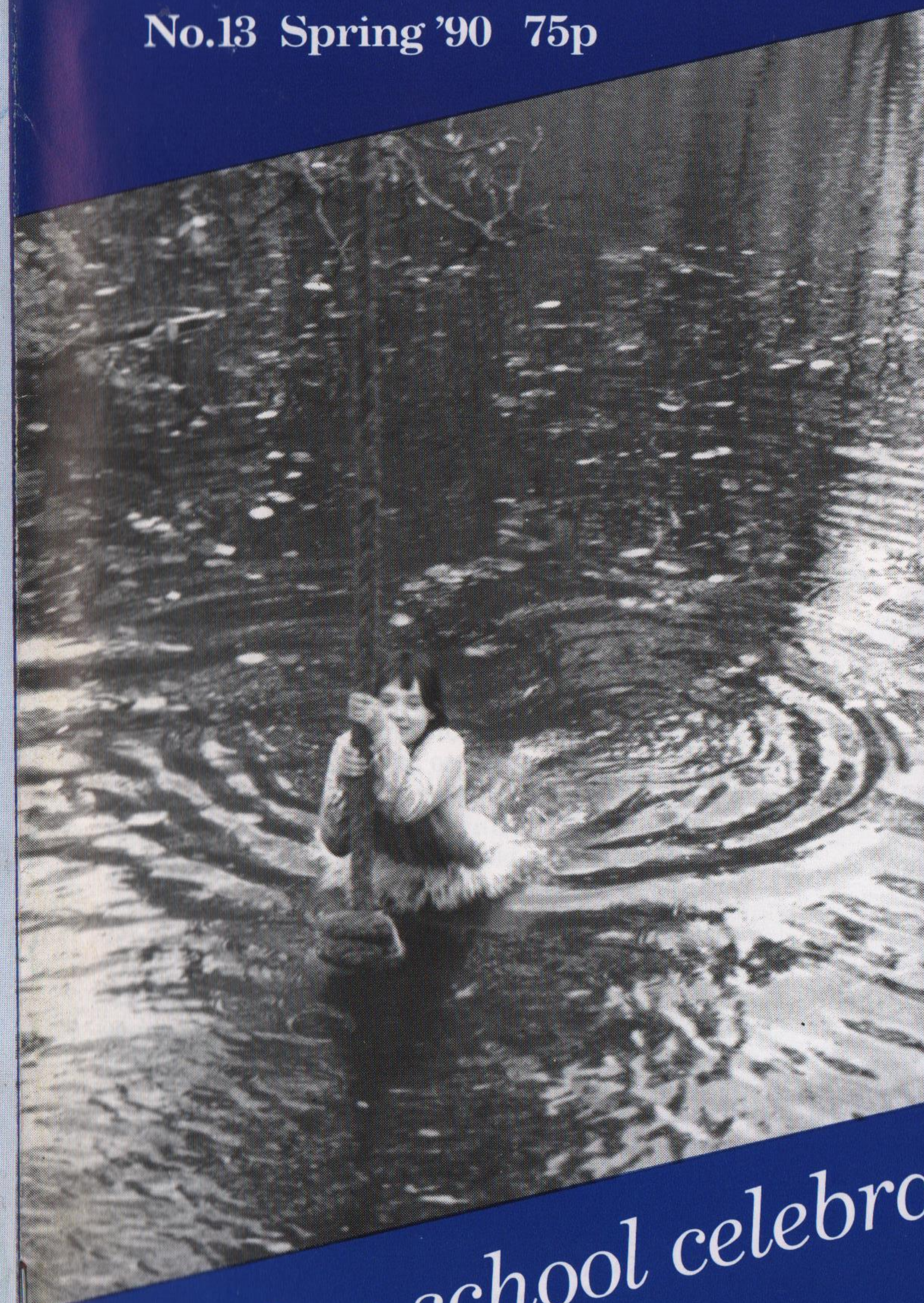
De Weide Free School
Sevekootstraat 67, Erpe-mere, Nr. Aalst, Belgium

Free Schools in Vienna
c/o Davidgasse 6/15, 1100 Vienna, Austria

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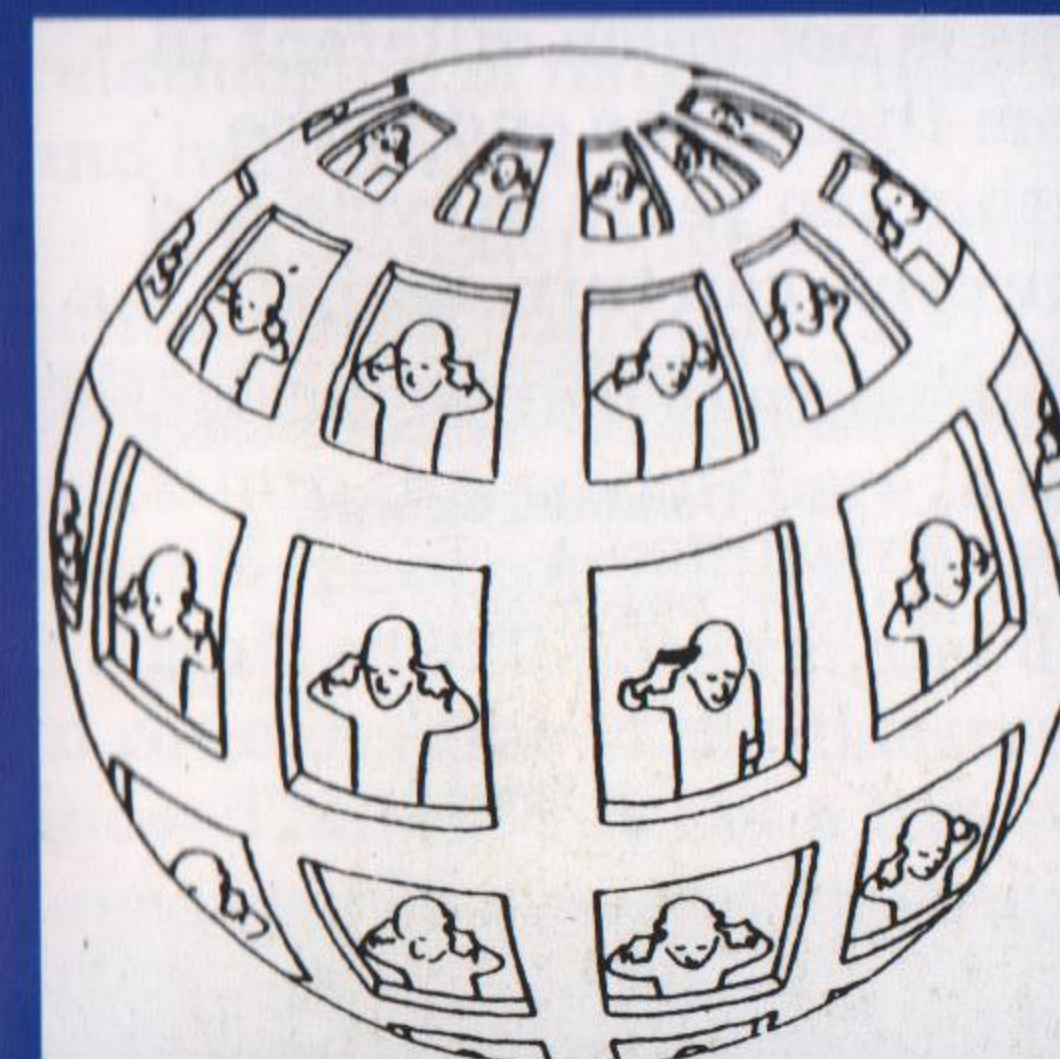
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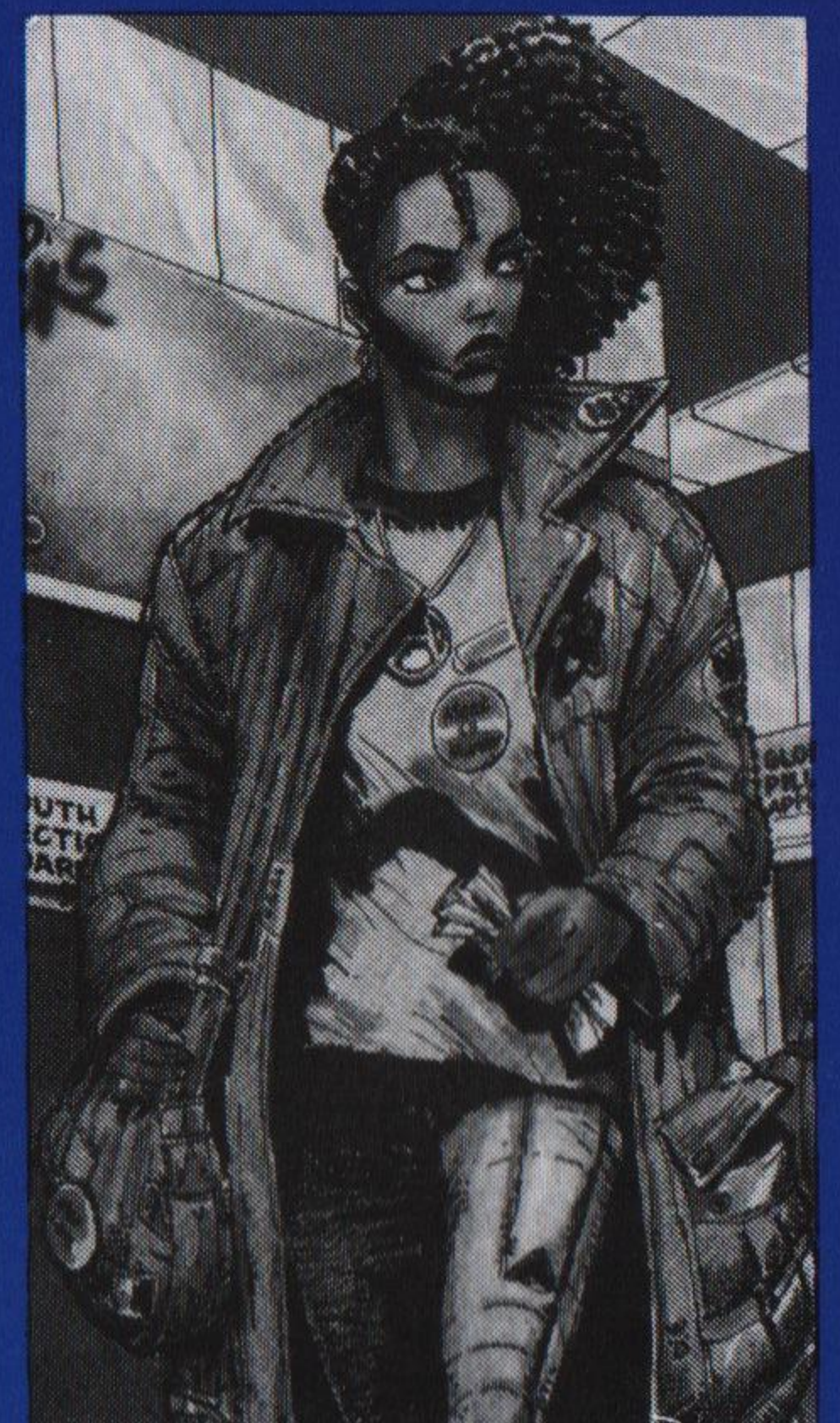


A free school celebrates its fiftieth birthday

COMIX
satire on society



LEARNING
to own the present and
control the future



Libertarian EDUCATION

A magazine for the liberation of learning

Vol 2 No 13 Spring 1990

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EDITORIAL

Exciting times

THESE ARE exciting times to live in. The peoples of Eastern Europe have risen, and blown away the grey cobwebs that entangled their lives. They have more problems ahead, but the energy given by the breath of freedom that has entered their lives will help them to go further forward.

But are we alone in already being tired of the voices proclaiming the victory of the West, the triumph of Capitalism. The West has stood by and watched while the barricades put up and fought over. If the West has won, then who has lost? Surely those with the Cold War mentality, that can only see the world in terms of the money and power that can be made from the Military-Industrial Complex.

The real triumph has been that of young people. Regimes that are despotic, authoritarian and exploitative do not have popular legitimacy. They are able to keep control only through persuading everybody into believing the lie that change is impossible.

The people who are able to break through the lie are young people. They are the people who have the energy, the nerve and the courage. The initial wave brings hope, and this hope then germinates into an unstoppable flood, as the possibility of change becomes real. The authoritarian regimes then implode, because without the lie they are nothing.

This has nothing to do with socialism or the Cold War. Rumania was no more socialist than the United States. Let those who are crowing about the victory of the West remember May 1968. Then it was the capitalist regimes that were on their heels and tottering, struggling to regain control from the young who had taken to the streets protesting at the poverty of everyday life, both material and spiritual.

The only way that the lid was kept on was for the government to buy off enough of the middle classes, and to divert enough peoples energy into spurious side issues. We may live in a more selfish egotistical society world now, but this is not much different in attitude from that of the end of the Fifties. Within ten years to cycle had turned. The cycle can turn again...

INTERNATIONAL

Indian insights

Lib ED's expanding archive of material on libertarian educational projects throughout the world is blessed with an enormous amount of material on innovative schools in India. In this article we begin a series examining these schools by focusing on one, Maharajah Sawai Man Singh Vidyalaya (MSMSV) in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

FACED with a young generation thirsting to learn but with few resources at its disposal, India's educational system is stretched to the limit. In general, schools in India are poorly equipped and structurally authoritarian.

Learning is often by rote, the simplest approach to dealing with large classes and the demands of a very prescriptive examination system, a legacy of British colonial rule. But there is also a rich and varied cultural tradition of libertarian values in education that radical teachers are trying to reclaim.

Last year, in one of his first speeches to the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Indian Parliament) the marvellous Indian novelist, R K Narayan, pleaded for the burden of stress-ridden education to be taken off children. He said that there was a need to change the whole system, "so that childhood has a chance to bloom rather than wilt in the dreadful process of learning."

We were fortunate enough to be able to talk to Narayan in his home in Mysore. He grieved over an educational system where children are overloaded with learning and had no time to play. He saw little hope for the system until it perished allowing something else to be put in its place.

Although he didn't know exactly what he wanted, "I am just a simple storyteller," he told us, Narayan alluded to the experimental schools in India that could act as models. MSMSV in Jaipur is just one such school.

MSMSV has been open for seven years. At the heart of its stated aims stands the desire to, "raise the awareness of the community in the minds of the pupils and to seek identification with it, entering into a relationship of natural understanding and helpfulness."

It is an independent fee-paying school which currently caters for 600 children aged five to sixteen. When you walk into the school there is the semblance of convention. Children wear a simple school uniform and desks are in rows in some of the classrooms. Indeed MSMSV is not a free school in any sense - for a start its fees restrict

participation to the middle classes - however, the innovation carried out under the guidance of its Principal, Mrs P N Kavoori, make it of special interest.

There is an unmistakable understanding, empathy and love

creation of a teacher resource centre in the school.

"Staff development in the school is important," Mrs Kavoori told us, "We want people with skills but I look for flexibility in teachers who want to come here. We have programmes for teachers that are centred around creating and encouraging sensitivity. I also look for teachers who want to integrate study, who want to explore the relationship between different subjects. Take South Africa, for example, you should be able to make studies of South Africa and its apartheid system using all different subjects, Mathematics, history and so on." Political debate is certainly at the forefront of the education at MSMSV. Groups of children produce wall magazines tackling issues such as colonialism, water, deforestation and freedom fighters.

India has a rich tradition of understanding between teacher and taught that has been lost amidst colonialism and post-colonial economic development.

The Guru Shishya Parambara (Teacher Student Tradition) is a product of the Bedicage Age where the school in Indian Civilisation was seen as an extension of family, the Guru Kul (Teacher Family).

This tradition is close to Mrs Kavoori's heart and the heart of the school.

"Let the child and the teacher realise his or her potential together. Let the child find their own wisdom, Atman Budhi (Yourself Wisdom). Do not push the child. This is an old tradition in Indian education. We have to remember that these ideas have proved themselves. They have created human things of great worth in the past that are part of our civilisation."

"Teachers and education have become commercial property. We have lost a sense of our past during economic development. There is a dissatisfaction with a system that is all about high marks and success. I and a close colleague have recently been nominated to the National Board of Education. We have the opportunity to campaign for our ideas nationally. The picture sometimes looks bleak but I think the years ahead will be full of change!"



Science classroom

between teachers and pupils and certainly no fear or intimidation.

Mrs Kavoori spoke of this spirit: "The essential speciality of the school is the understanding that the teachers have with the students and the students have with each other. They always try to solve positively the problems that arise from day to day."

"I keep all doors open all the time. Teachers, children, parents can walk into my office anytime. We all try to help each other. We create teams here where we explore belonging to the institution. We encourage children to come to the school when they want, even during the holidays. We talk to the children about the building, what we and they need. This way it becomes their school."

Central to the school's growth is the

I am the LAW

While comics have never had the same popularity in this country as they have abroad, they have flourished as a sub-culture. Judge Dredd is the most successful character. He is a sign of the times, and his comics are a biting satire on the society we live in. Here *Lib ED* looks at the Dredd phenomenon.

THE MOST successful comic book character in Britain today is *2000AD*'s Judge Dredd, the grim unsmiling policeman of Mega City One. He made his first appearance in the second issue of the comic back in March 1977, but has since assumed proportions of a small industry.

Dredd still appears every week in *2000AD* and since January 1986 as a comic strip in the *Daily Star*, but that is by no means all. He also appears in a variety of book formats: there are the *Judge Dredd* and *2000AD* Annuals, the *Titan Books* large format prestige reprints (27 volumes so far) and cheaper pocket sized reprints (5 volumes), and the *Fleetway Crime Files* (4 volumes) and *Judge Dredd Collections* (4 volumes).

On top of this, the American reprints of the Judge Dredd stories that are published monthly by Quality Comics are also freely available in this country.

There is also a Judge Dredd board game, a computer game and a variety of tasteful Judge Dredd teeshirts. And there is a Judge Dredd film in prospect. Clearly what we have here is a phenomenon of some importance.

For those who don't know, Dredd is one of the caste of Judges who control the destinies of the great city state societies that have emerged in the 22nd Century.

These massive urban complexes are only prevented from collapsing into chaos and disaster by the iron rule of the Judges, men and women raised from infancy to devote themselves to the LAW.

The Judges are police, prosecutor, jury, judge and, when need be, executioner all rolled into one. And in Mega City One, Dredd is the most respected and/or feared of the Judges.

At first appearances then we have the somewhat uncomfortable situation whereby the most popular comic book character in Thatcher's Britain just happens to be a violent, bullying, authoritarian policeman. He is an archetypal fascist pig, helping to maintain in power an undemocratic, dictatorial regime that rules by lies, manipulation and force without any regard whatsoever for civil liberties.

The situation is, fortunately, more complex than this. What we are looking at are comic stories that are imaginative, exciting, witty, often ferociously satirical, and that feature

some of the best artwork in comics anywhere today. Judge Dredd can appeal to both the juvenile fan and the middle aged Marxist, and indeed does both in my family.

Crucial to the success of the Dredd stories is the environment of Mega City One, the vast urban jungle where 800 million people are crammed in together. Here the problems of our own time exist in exaggerated, magnified, form. There is 87 per cent unemployment with most people never having had a job and 95 per cent of the population live in mile high tower blocks, each housing 60,000 people.

The premium of this life of claustrophobic boredom drive some mad and others to crime. Wars between tower blocks are not uncommon. Millions of people are forced to live in mobile homes, mobile homes that are just that, continually on the move along the city's 13 billion miles of roadway, never allowed to stop.

This is a world of consumerism gone mad, of Otto Sump's Ugly Clinics and of the Fatties with their belly wheels and huge appetites.

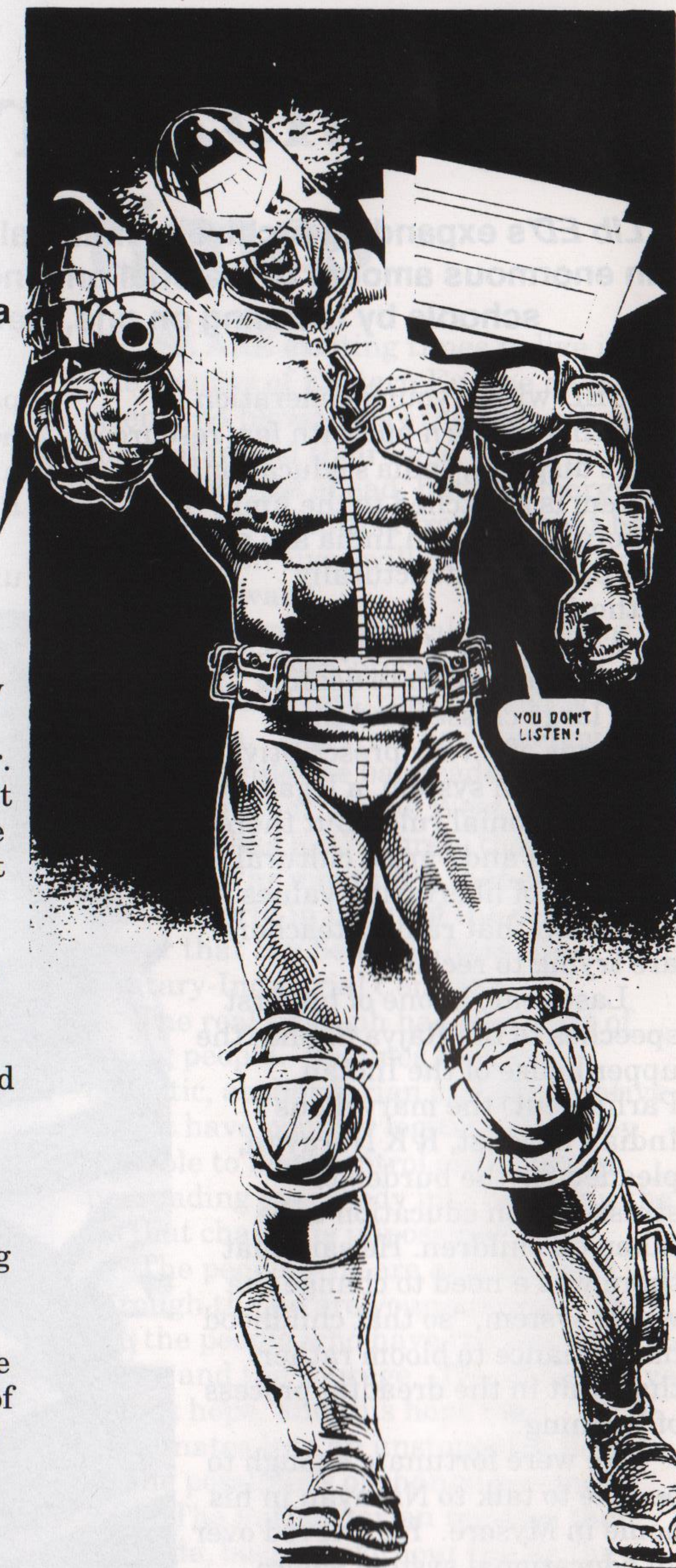
Even before Thatcher came to power, *2000AD* had people on Mega City One's moon colony having their oxygen cut off for not paying their bills! The sheer scale and variety of the city astonishes and excites the imagination. It serves as a superb vehicle for social satire.

Dredd both protects and oppresses Mega City One. He protects it from routine everyday crime, disposing of mutant outlaws on Halloween, of the rogue Judge, Crazy Barry, of the vigilantes who burned down Cardboard City, the home of the down-and-outs, and a host of other perps.

Stookie glanding, empty bagging, futsie, body sharking, reading comics, driving too slow and using sugar are all serious crimes that Dredd ruthlessly cracks down on.

These are only small potatoes though compared to the threat to the very existence of the city posed by Starborn Thing, by Father Earth and the Domsday Dogs, by Chief Judge Caligula and by the Apocalypse War.

The most interesting threat to confront Dredd and his fellow Judges, however, is undoubtedly that posed by Judge Death, a grotesque skeletal Judge from another dimension where life itself is against the law, who



regularly manifests himself in Mega City One.

It is the Judge Death stories that show the Judges at their best, at their most heroic, as the defenders of life itself. In these episodes, Judge Anderson, a woman, always plays an important role. However, while Dredd is the embodiment of strength and power, Anderson a psi specialist, a skill which in these stories seems little more than an exaggerated development of good old 'woman's intuition'.

As well as the adventure stories, there are also many humorous ones, where Dredd is cast in what is almost a Buster Keaton role, remaining determinedly serious and stone-faced in an otherwise manic world. This is Dredd as stooge.

Which brings us at last to Dredd the oppressor, the ruthless enforcer of unjust laws upon a frightened resentful population. Mega City One's laws are so all-embracing and intrusive that it is virtually impossible for its citizens not to violate them at some time or other.

Then they experience justice a la Judge, where the punishment is often far, ludicrously far, in excess of the

crime. These satirical swipes at authoritarianism and at a bullying police mentality are sometimes given a sharper, more political edge.

The story that best exemplifies this is 'Revolution' where the rule of the Judges is challenged by the Democracy Movement. Dredd is charged by Chief Judge Silver with smashing this movement by any means necessary and proceeds to do just that.

Extortion, intimidation, harassment, smear tactics, the use of agent provocateurs, an unprovoked attack on a peaceful demonstration, mass arrests and imprisonments break the movement. As Dredd tells his fellow Judges, "Democracy is a cancer eating at the heart of our society. Any action we have to take to stamp it out - however regrettable - is justified."

In other story, investigative journalist, Fisher Wildman, discovers that the Judges are keeping the city's population under control by releasing

tranq gas into the atmosphere. When he attempts to expose this, he is arrested and lobotomised on Dredd's orders. The social order must be safeguarded. This must be the grimmest Judge Dredd story yet.

The other side of these stories that concern themselves with the nature of the Judges' authoritarian rule are those that celebrate resistance to them. The best of these relate the adventures of Marlon 'Chopper' Shakespeare. Chopper is the symbol of the free spirit whether he is graffitiing the Statue of Judgement (this towers over the Statue of Liberty!) or illegally skysurfing.

The Judges arrest him, lock him away, try to beat him down, break his spirit, turn him into a nobody like they have everyone else... but Chopper refuses to bow down.

Clearly Judge Dredd is a long way removed from that earlier British comic book hero, Dan Dare, and in this reflects important changes in the way

that British society regards itself. Instead of Pilot of the Future as the country's major comic character, we now have the Policeman of the Future. Where Dare was concerned with freedom, Dredd is concerned with order; even their names provide testimony to the significance of the change that has taken place.

The Dredd phenomenon is very much a sign of the times, a comic book representation to its juvenile readership of a consumerist society in serious difficulties, where disorder and social breakdown are just below the surface.

This is a society where those in control often show themselves to be authoritarian bullies who are not to be trusted. From this point of view, the Dredd stories can be seen as a marvellously funny, exciting and satirical commentary on our times.

They have something to say to a large number of young people and are well worth following.

Whose crisis?

TOWARDS the end of September 1988 Fleetway began publishing a new comic, *Crisis*, a comic with a difference. It was aimed at the late teens age group and had an open and unashamed interest in politics, in radical politics, that was completely new for a commercially produced large circulation comic.

The intention seems to have been to publish a comic that would hold onto *2000AD* readers as they got older and presumably outgrew Judge Dredd, Zenith, Rogue Trooper, Slainne and the rest of the gang.

The result has been a powerful committed comic that has carried some of the best revolutionary artwork seen for years, a comic that is ferociously anti-racist, anti-Imperialist and anti-Establishment.

The key to *Crisis*'s success is undoubtedly the 'Third World War' strip, originated by Pat Mills and Carlos Ezquerro. This started off concerned with the Third World, but since issue 15 it has been about a grim violent near-future Britain.

The country has been devastated by the great economic collapse of 1996, living standards have plummeted and society is on the verge of chaos. Racism is running wild and armed gangs fight each other in the streets. The country is disintegrating and a new world is struggling to be born.

Gang violence and police repression have led to the setting up of the Black African Defence Squad (BADS) and to the establishment of a no-go area, New Azania, in Brixton. In control of the resistance is a female ruling council.

The story follows the adventures of Eve Collins, Rohan Lake, Liat, Sonny

MAYBE SO. BUT I
DRAW THE LINE AT
INTIMIDATION...



Boy and others as they fight to survive and hopefully transform this frightening world.

The images of the resistance and struggle presented by the strip are dramatic and powerful, but most compelling is the portrayal of the racist, sexist policeman, Chief Inspector Ryan of Safecorp, the privatised police force.

The exploration of his corrupt twisted psyche in issue 25 is a masterpiece. This is our enemy laid bare before us, exposed, naked. Know who and what he is.

Crisis also carries other strips, both serial and occasional. 'Sticky Fingers', 'Troubled Souls', 'New Statesmen' and, at the time of writing, the powerful 'True Faith' story are all worth attention.

Also worthy of notice are some of the

one-off strips, for example, 'The Student Konstabel' in issue 28 and the incredible 'The Clicking of High Heels' in issue 32. This last strip, by Sarah Bramley-Anderson and Floyd Hughes, concerns sexual harassment on the streets. It is a work of the highest order.

There have been problems though. Since issue 30 *Crisis* has carried a 'NOT FOR SALE TO CHILDREN' label on the front. More seriously the comic promised a thirty-two page strip, 'Skin', by Peter Milligan and Brendan McCarthy that was to have appeared in this same issue.

'Skin' looked at the life of a fourteen year old Thalidomide skinhead. It was heavily advertised, but then abruptly dropped because of legal objections to its sex, violence and bad language. Apparently the printers refused to print the story and Fleetway were then advised that it might be considered likely to "deprave and corrupt" any skinhead readers!

This setback shows what a tightrope the *Crisis* team have to negotiate. Hopefully, 'Skin' will be published elsewhere by braver souls and when it is we shall give it a full review.

Despite this, *Crisis* is a triumph. Its success artistically, politically and commercially shows its readers that they are not alone, that not everyone is happy with the *Sport* or the *Sun*. Any comic that is prepared to carry a full page advertisement for *Class War* has obviously got something going for it. If you haven't read it yet, give it a try.

Early in 1990 Fleetway are promising to launch a further addition to the *2000AD* stable, *Revolver*. This should also be well worth looking out for.

Shaping the future

The future is something that always seems to be confined to science fiction. Here David Hicks looks at alternative futures, and the need to educate and plan for their development.

"Wherever I look", said a friend, "I keep seeing the word 'future'. It's just another fad". Well, it does seem as if the last decade of a century prompts more widespread speculation than usual about the future, but this is no bad thing as we approach the third millennium AD.

We need to look at, and to think about, alternative futures, not least because there has been a growing consensus for some time that humankind is at a major turning point. As we face problems of global warming, with its consequent potential for mass disruption of human affairs, there is increasing uncertainty both about what sort of future we want, and what we might get.

futures may therefore have already vanished from possible consciousness.

We steal the birthright of the young in order to impose our own more limited and sanitised visions. Many children thus learn to become docile consumers, their images of the future often unwitting parodies of the 'technocratic/consumerist dream'.

Secondly, many 'experts' on the future take the existing socio-political status quo as a 'given', and thereby promote images of the future which merely serve to perpetuate the global economic inequalities of the present. Based, as they often are, on mechanistic, technocratic and patriarchal assumptions, such scenarios, it can be argued, merely

Slaughter's words, "We cannot alter the past, but we have common interests in achieving life-preserving, sustainable future."

It follows that a central task for teachers is to explore with their pupils some of the major problems and possibilities that lie ahead, and therefore sensitise them to the implications of choices and actions in the present ... The 'future' assumes new meaning when we realise that we cannot 'opt out'. All actions and choices (including choices *not* to act or choose) have consequences.

Our lives are constantly shaped by images of the future, whether of what we hope will happen tomorrow or of our plans for the next year. If, however, we are not fully aware of the options open to us, both in our personal lives and globally, then our choices are made on insufficient and inadequate evidence.

Teaching and learning about the future can thus help students to become more flexible and adaptable, to be pro-active rather than re-active to change. It can also help develop critical thinking skills and the creative imagination, be a spur to personal achievement and help to develop a sense of responsible and co-operative global citizenship.

Ten Propositions

Much of the current enlightened thinking about futures can be summarised in the following ten propositions, all of which can be explored in different ways in the classroom.

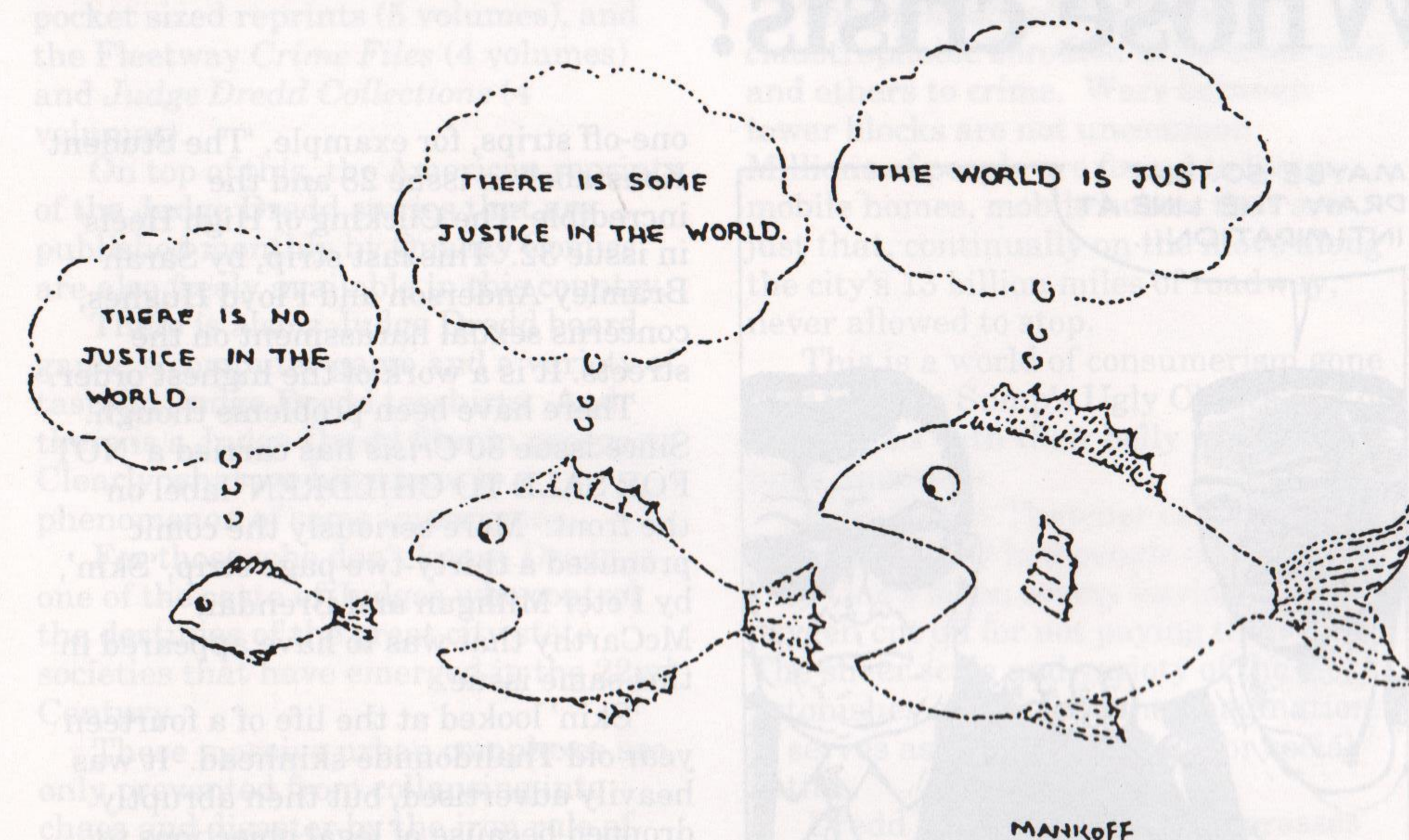
1. The future is *not* predictable, neither is it predetermined.
2. There thus exist a wide variety of *alternative futures*.
3. These are commonly divided into *possible, probable and preferable* futures.
4. Human decisions and actions/inactions *shape* the future.
5. There is a need, therefore, for *conscious choice and participation* in relevant decision making.
6. The present period is one of *unique importance* for future generations.
7. It is necessary to *act responsibly* and on behalf of future generations when involved in change processes.
8. Pre-action is always preferable to 'crisis learning'.
9. *Holistic, global and long range* perspectives are all essential if we are to make sense of current trends.

"colonise the future" on behalf of existing elites.

Futures of Education

We need to help children explore a range of alternative futures because, in times of rapid change such as ours, anticipatory skills become essential for survival. Whilst the school curriculum tends to be embedded in the past, it is enacted in the present and, at least theoretically, is orientated towards the future. Thus all approaches to education make some assumptions about the future, even though it is often that the future will be much like, or a glossier version of, today.

Teaching about the future is therefore not just about being fashionable, but has, rather, a clear educational rationale. In Rick

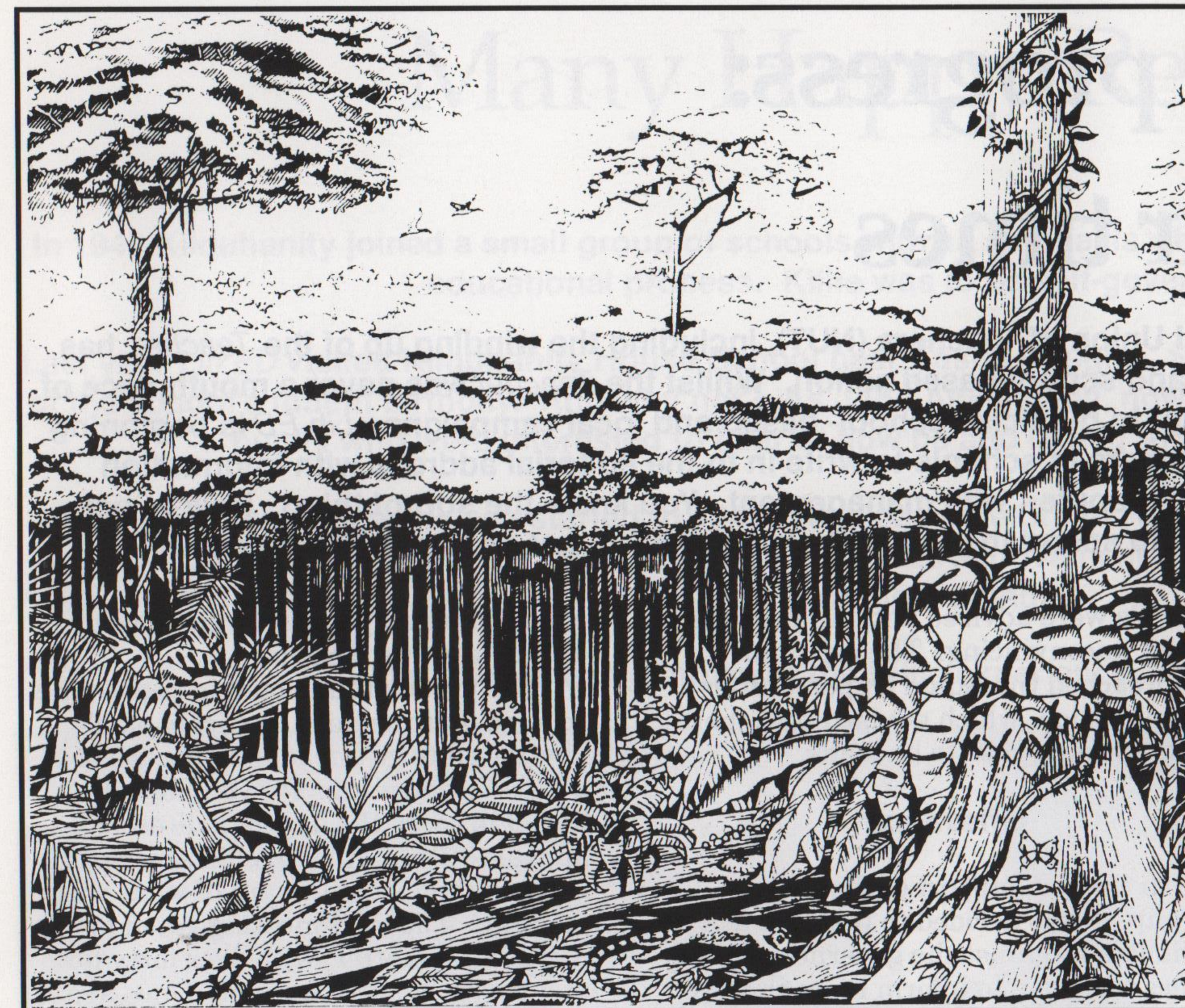


MANIKOFF

Because issues to do with the future often seem intangible and unknowable, and because this may create anxiety, then teachers often feel that it is not a legitimate area to explore with students. Yet it is essential that we do, for, to rephrase George Orwell, "He who owns the present, will control the future".

Temporal colonialism

There are two main ways in which the future can be 'colonised'. Firstly, adults directly and indirectly try to control children's images of the future, both through the media and through their own more limited ways of thinking and being. Thus, from an early age, children will have had their thinking about tomorrow's possibilities diminished. A range of potential



10. The images that we have of the future can act as powerful guides to actions in the present.

Global Futures Project

If we are really to educate young people for the 21st century, what sort of education do they need and how will the National Curriculum provide it? The new Global Futures Project was set up to specifically focus on the entitlement of young people to preparation for responsible and active citizenship as members of the global community.

Resources

Chapter 7, The World Tomorrow, in *World Studies 8-13: A Teacher's Handbook*, Fisher S and Hicks D, Oliver and Boyd, 1985.

The Temporal Dimension, in Chapter 1 of *Global Teacher, Global Learner*, Pike G and Selby D, Hodder and Stoughton, 1988.

Chapter 13, Futures, by Rick Slaughter, in *Education for Peace: Issues, Principles and Practice in the Classroom*, ed. Hicks D, Routledge, 1989.

Chapter 1, Understanding the World, in *Making Global Connections: A World Studies Workbook*, Eds. Hicks D and Steiner M, Oliver and Boyd, 1989.

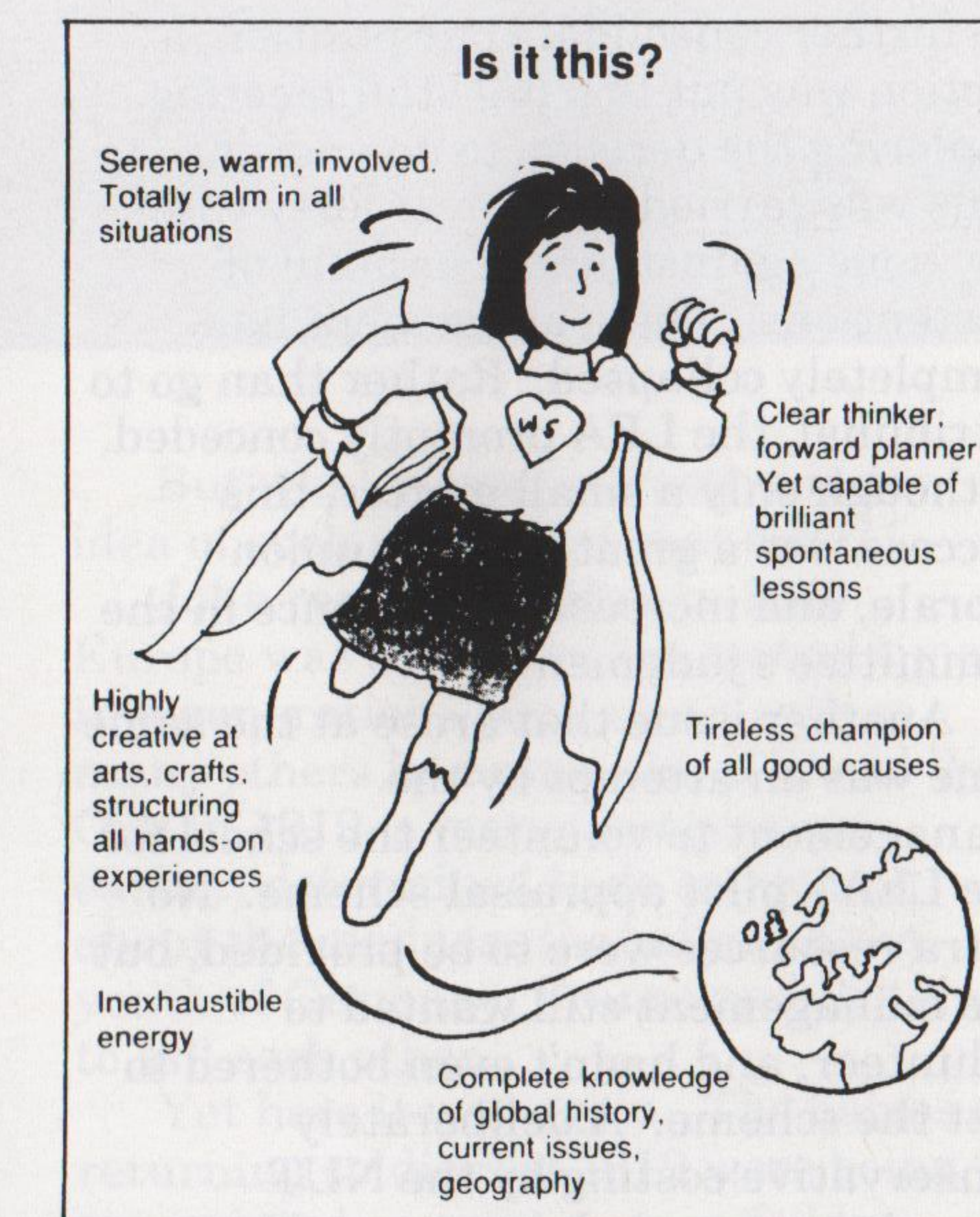
For reference, *The Sane Alternative: A Choice of Futures*, Robertson J, 1983.

For background, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture*, Capra F, Flamingo/Fontana, 1983.

The project arises out of, and will build on, much of the excellent work carried out in world studies during the last decade. It will help teachers and pupils look at four questions: Where are we now? How did we get here? Where do we want to go? And how will we get there? These questions can be applied both to our personal lives and to the world more generally.

Traditionally, subjects such as Science, Geography and History, and cross-curricular concerns such as world studies and environmental education have tended to focus on the first two of these questions. One result of this has often been to overwhelm young people with problems, in short to disempower them.

The Global Futures Project will



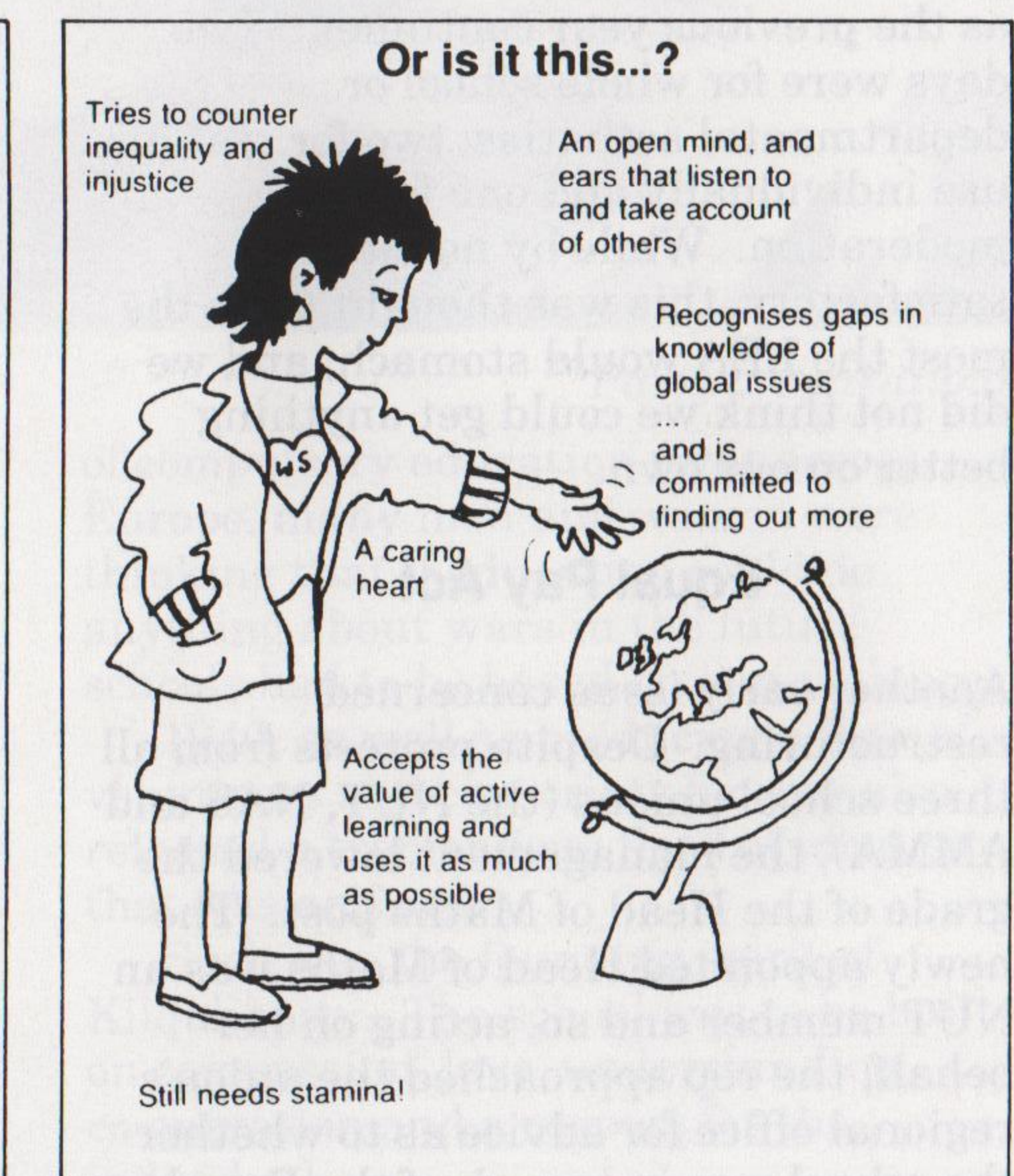
focus, in particular, on the last two questions. It will help teachers and students to:

1. *clarify* their choice of preferred futures at scales from the personal to the global;
2. *envision* alternative futures which are both just and ecologically sustainable;
3. *exercise* their rights responsibly in working for appropriate local and global change.

A central concern of the project will be identifying the nature of radical active citizenship in the local and global community. The project will also draw on utopian experiments from the past. In so doing it will honour a long-standing historical tradition of visionary commitment. Utopias are 'greenprints' for creating a better world. There is much to be learnt from them about the nature of the 'good life' and the 'good society' which is pertinent to the needs of the 21st century.

Over the next three years the project will work with teachers to produce appropriate resource materials for both primary and secondary pupils. It will be of interest to those concerned with foundation subjects such as Geography and English, Religious Education, and cross-curricular concerns such as personal and social education, environmental education and citizenship.

"A map without Utopia on it", wrote Robin Richardson, "is not worth consulting... Admittedly there are disadvantages in dreams and ideals, the disadvantages of unreality and abstractions. But frequently it also clears and strengthens your mind if you venture to dream for a while, as concretely and as practically as possible, about the ideal situation to which all your current efforts are, you hope, directed". It is time now to do just that.



All graphics from *Making Global Connections*

Strategies for progress: a diary for our times

The recent reorganisation of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), including the winding up of the *Teacher*, has left many teachers unaware of localised and school-based action. Whilst the *Teacher* was never a mouthpiece of militancy, it did make some sort of attempt to publicise school-based and local campaigns. *Lib ED* is beginning a union diary, and encourages union members in schools to write in to the editorial address with information about strategies used in negotiations and disputes with management. You know the sort of thing. How to get your head exiled to the Isle of Wight, how to spend the Baker Days at home ... Let us know. We'll print it.

THIS IS a brief account of the activities of a forty-strong NUT group in the first half of the autumn term. The school in question is an 11-18 comprehensive, with some 70 teaching staff. The NUT membership elect a representative and deputy representative (they have to be of different sexes), and a committee to run the group's day-to-day affairs.

This particular school was heavily involved in the teachers' dispute from which it emerged strong, confident and determined. This is still the case, with the result that it has been possible, within limits, to protect the conditions of *all* the teachers in the school.

Baker Days

The first important issue of the school year was the allocation of Baker Days. The union group insists on an acceptable agreement being reached over these before it will agree to the allocation of the 1265 hours. In the first year we refused to do any Baker Days at all, but last year the LEA intervened. It was necessary to threaten to boycott all after-school activities (including bus duties) before a satisfactory agreement was reached.

This year threats were not necessary, and the same arrangement as the previous year continued. Two days were for whole school or departmental activities, two for staff to use individually and one for moderation. While by no means satisfactory, this was thought to be the most the LEA would stomach, and we did not think we could get anything better on our own.

Equal Pay Act

Another early issue concerned restructuring. Despite protests from all three school unions (the NUT, NAS and AMMA), the management lowered the grade of the Head of Maths post. The newly appointed Head of Maths was an NUT member and so, acting on her behalf, the rep approached the union's regional office for advice as to whether the school was in breach of the Equal Pay Act.

We were advised not, but found this most unconvincing. The rep then approached the Equal Opportunities Commission, which advised that there was a strong case to be made.

Grievance

With the full support of the school group, it was decided to take out a grievance against the governors, and at the same time to inform them that we were also going to take them to an Industrial Tribunal. It was decided to do both simultaneously so as to maximise the pressure and increase their discomfort. Our hand was considerably strengthened, at this point, by press reports of a similar case in Yorkshire, which had been taken up by the NAS.

The tribunal's judgment had been in favour of the teacher claiming equal pay but, most interestingly, had also held that the excuse that the school had already used up its allocation of allowances was not valid. This could not deprive somebody of their rights in law, and the LEA would have to provide another allowance!

Management collapse

To further consolidate our position, a motion was put to a full staff meeting deploring the decision to downgrade. This was carried, with over forty votes for, none against, and a handful of abstentions. The management had completely collapsed. Rather than go to a tribunal, the LEA promptly conceded. Although only a small matter, this success was a great boost to union morale, and increased confidence in the committee's judgment.

Another issue that arose at the same time was an attempt by the management to volunteer the school for the LEA's pilot appraisal scheme. No extra resources were to be provided, but the management still wanted to volunteer, and hadn't even bothered to cost the scheme. A deliberately conservative costing by the NUT committee revealed that it would involve over 500 teacher periods, which

would inevitably mean larger classes and/or less free periods.

The union group voted to oppose the scheme, but the head unwisely (she's new) tried to go ahead and discuss it at a full staff meeting. Presumably she hoped to carry the day by a direct appeal to staff. A lot of effort was put into making people aware of what was at stake. The staff meeting voted not to discuss the matter, with over forty for and only a handful against. Once again the management collapsed with the senior deputy actually voting with the good guys and another abstaining.

National union

All these were defensive issues, protecting staff against attempts to worsen conditions. On pay, we have to look to the national union. Here we are confronted with an absolutely laughable publicity campaign, and an open and clearly stated determination *not* to fight to protect our salaries and conditions.

What worries us is not just that we have had yet another wage cut imposed, but that the present national leadership will be unable to prevent us losing another week of our holidays, or having our working day extended. Many teachers are also worried (scared shitless might be more accurate) by the additional workload that the National Curriculum will involve.

Industrial action

The NUT group held a joint meeting with the NAS to discuss pay and a resolution was unanimously passed calling for a campaign of industrial action. It was also agreed to issue a press release to that effect (the story appeared in the local paper the following week). Confidence in McAvoy and the national leadership, however, is virtually nil.

They are regarded with varying mixtures of despair, contempt, anger and hatred. What is clear in our school is that teachers have had enough of being walked over, but that we are being let down quite shamefully by our union.

Many Happy Returns

In 1940 Kilquhanity joined a small group of schools with an emphasis which placed children at the centre of the educational process. Killie was to be self-governing and free.

Last year *Lib ED* visited Kilquhanity House School near Castle Douglas, Scotland. This year will see celebrations of the school's fiftieth birthday. And why not? As John Aitkenhead, now in his eighties, said to a small group of pupils who were interested to hear of how he and Morag Aitkenhead began the school,

"Now kids, you know that we started in 1940. Neill came before us, of course, but you have to remember the movement is older than that. 100 years ago there was a movement for freedom in education. Killie is just carrying it along!"

What follows is a glimpse of the Killie experience, both past and present



Party preparations

LIBERTARIAN educational projects were already relatively well-established by 1940. Summerhill, Dartington Hall and Beacon Hill had been running since the twenties. They were quite distinct from the fairly large number of liberal progressive independent schools that formed the New Education Fellowship whose mouthpiece was the magazine *New Era*.

Much inspired by A.S. Neill, John Aitkenhead described Killie as "a real war effort... the answer to the mass violence that broke across the world in 1939."

But what was so attractive in the idea of such a school at that time?

John reminds us that in 1940 Europe was at war for the second time in a generation. Neill along with so many others had come out of World War One in 1919, a mere twenty years earlier, determined to do something about the madness that allowed the youth of Germany, France and Britain to kill each other.

Yet here it was again. The babies of returning soldiers of 1919 were being conscripted as more cannon fodder.

Seventy years after the introduction

of compulsory education right across Europe, many men and women were thinking that if education could do anything about wars in the future, schools had to be based on non-violence.

1940, as well as producing a flow of volunteers and conscripts for war also released a tremendous flood of idealism that was anti-war.

Such was the founding spirit of Kilquhanity. The school was to be built on compassion, love, understanding, co-operation and a respect for the individual.

That spirit lives on.

“What’s Killie about? It’s about freedom, power, control, fun and lentils. I really think we should ban the lentils.”

KILLIE STUDENT

ACCORDING to Gillis and Aaron, two Killie hands of five or six years, “Breakfast is out by 8.00 am, and if you’re not down for it by 8.30 you can kiss it goodbye.” Aaron did add that you might want to do that anyway, but what is wrong with cold porridge?

For boarders like Gillis and Aaron, this is how the day begins. But really the whole community does not gather until after breakfast, when the “outsiders”, day pupils, arrive. The split is pretty much fifty-fifty, and all combine together on “useful work” after 8.30.

This may mean helping to milk the cows, feeding the pigs and chickens, beginning the household chores, sweeping the dorms and preparing the vegetables for the midday and evening meals.

There is a huge emphasis on togetherness and co-operation, a lasting testament to the spiritual roots of the school in 1940.

At 9.30, compulsory lesson time begins, and continues until 11.00. It resumes again at 1.30, finishing with the end of the official school day at 3.00.

However, we should beware of imagining some great authoritarian structure. John has always wanted to have set lessons, but within the actual lesson time there is great freedom.

In an English lesson, one girl may be reading a favourite author, another writing an article for the Killie magazine.

John has always talked of freedom in this way. “A person may be free to jump in the water or not to jump in the water. But if they jump they’re not free to remain dry. At Kilquhanity, children can choose whether or not to do a particular lesson at the beginning of a term, but if they choose they must abide by the requirements of the teachers and the subject.”

“They say, ‘free as a bird in the air’,

but a bird has to obey the rules of aerodynamics.” Set lessons provide the basic structure, and the important thing is that no lesson is compulsory. If you don’t want to do Maths, then you don’t have to, but you must choose something else.

Between 11.30 and 12.30 there is free choice. This essentially means that pupils can tap into any activity of their own choosing from day to day. This might mean English or Drama, but it could also mean draining the meadow, or repairing a fence.

It may also mean doing nothing at all. Gillis told us that by 11.30 he needed a rest but others, including Tammy and Rachel, like the structured times and wished for far more.

After 3.00 pm the outsiders begin to drift away but activity still abounds: around the pond; on the football field; in some of the workshops.

For the boarders the last meal is in the early evening but dependent on your bedtime there is also a hot milky drink available before lights out.

The Killie day is full of variety. The school is located in beautiful surroundings and is a haven of dens and secret places.

There is a nice balance between ‘structured’ activities and ‘free’ choice. Further, the differing needs of a wide age range - from five to sixteen, boarders and day pupils, appear to be well met.

Nothing epitomises Killie’s sense of community more than the weekly meeting, which is built on the Summerhill model.

The meeting is compulsory for everybody in the community, from the teachers to the eight-year-olds. It takes place in a beautiful octagonal building called the Dome. People sit around the walls facing each other. Eye contact is possible with everybody.

A student takes the chair and there are announcements and pieces of information given by teachers and pupils. Activities are also organised through the meeting. However, the main function of the meeting is to discuss the day to day running of the community, and any problems that arise out of it.

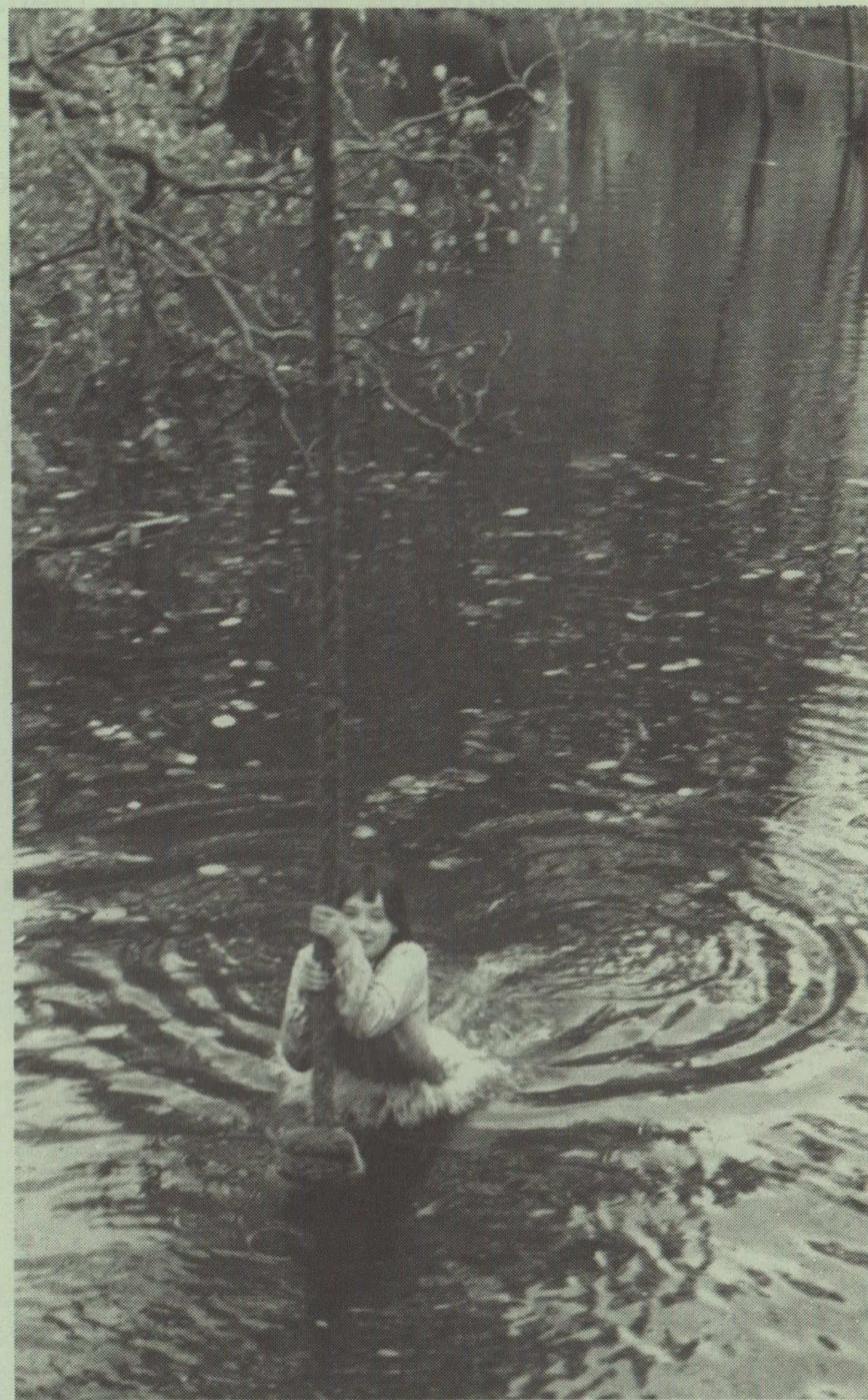
The result is that it often acts as a tribunal. Disputes between children and between children and teachers are raised and discussed calmly and at length. There is a search for consensus.

What is unique is the close attention given to the business by the enormously wide age range.

Children do not experience the meeting as a drudge or a bore, largely because it is about them, and as a result they fully participate in it.

The meeting is also a safe arena. People are never put on trial, but the community often demands explanations. There are no official sanctions, but the meeting will always decide an appropriate course of action in relation to misdemeanours.

John has described the meeting as



“Free to jump in the water... but not free to remain dry”

“like a primitive tribe. They can see justice being done and everybody can have a say, this is valuable. But think of the civics in this practical government. Real feelings enter into this, real lives are being affected, it’s a thousand times better than mock debates. They learn patience and tolerance and charity.”

Indeed Kilquhanity is a tolerant community. It accommodates a wide range of opinion and has a commitment to a large degree of personal autonomy.



Hide and seek

JOHN once wrote, “Looking back over the years of the school’s growth and at its present shape and form, I am reminded of a feature that has been constantly present; the building, the converting, the making that is always going on. I imagine that kids here for any length of time think they have built the school. As indeed they have - or helped to build it.”

This has happened, indeed is happening, in many different ways. Children build their own huts in trees, on the ground, even beneath the ground. Farm buildings have been converted for all kinds of purposes but often retain the name of the original function of the building. Amongst the bedrooms are the “henhouse” and the “duckhouse”. “Printed and published in the bullock-shed” appears on the cover of each issue of the school’s magazine.

The latest addition to the school’s buildings is the Dome, which took seven years to build and now houses such activities as the weekly meeting and the theatre in the round.

John articulates the meaning of this important area of school activity, “Who could begin to measure the educational value to youngsters of being involved in such enterprises? The modern world is changing, and changing fast, we know, but it is society that is changing. The physical basis is still there, and the elements are the same as ever. Boys and girls have their feet on the ground, where we all live and move and have our being.”

Killie rambles. From farm to English room, from the pond up to the art and craft workshops, from the kindergarten to the kitchen. There is a staff room, endless bedrooms, and a playing field. All is set within the most beautiful and unspoiled rolling countryside. Not surprisingly it is a peaceful place.

Children can study English and Languages, Modern Studies, Maths, Woodwork, Art, Pottery, Crafts, a little Science but not very much, Cooking, Drama, Dancing. All this and more, and an endless range of outdoor activities

which can begin on the farm and finish with a game of rounders.

John once wrote a piece about rounders:

“Games, it has to be all ages together. Take playing rounders on half a football field. I suppose most schools wouldn’t call it games at all, but the charity - letting the little ones get to first base, not getting them out too soon - this is what games should be. I suppose a small school like this, for all ages, can be called inefficient these days, but only in the narrow sense, only in subject learning. It’s not inefficient when it comes to the unmeasurable values that have been developed. Brains aren’t everything. Human qualities like reliability, stickability, integrity - these qualities grow here simply out of living together.”

The issue of compulsion has always attracted attention in any debate about Kilquhanity. Neill always felt that Summerhill was unique because there was no compulsory study. This was what made Summerhill free. Somehow any school that did not do the same could not be free - in Neill’s eyes anyway.

But it is the experience of children that is important. At Kilquhanity there is a structure but it is not repressive. The children at the school do not experience compulsory lesson time as being authoritarian, and if they did they have the facility to change it.

“If you want to do something here you can. Anybody can use free choice how they like. It could be Latin, Greek or anything. But I get terribly confused at times. I know I like it here, it’s a fantastic experience and a lot of the teachers and teaching are really good. I sometimes long to go to an ordinary school though because of the range of things that are immediately open to you. Here it all takes so much time and before you know where you are the motivation has gone. I worry about what I’m going to do with my life but on the other hand I know I’m happiest when I’m here.”

“I’m not going to be lost when I leave here but I know it’s not going to be so easy. It’s a sheltered community, it’s an isolated part of the world. But I know I’m glad I came - it’s good preparation for something. I’m just not quite sure what.”

KILLIE STUDENT

“John A? Everybody respects him - he’s been here so long. You can get very close to him, he’s a lovable man. But he does go on a bit. Mind you all the teachers do. I suppose I’d rather have his going on than most of the other teachers.”

KILLIE STUDENT

FOR TOO long John Aitkenhead, now in his eighties, has lived in A S Neill’s shadow both as an educational thinker and as a practitioner. He has actually written very little but his thoughts on schooling in general, and on child-rearing, the family, love, experiments and playing the system in particular, are a gold mine of ideas, inspiration and advice.

Lib ED It must be fascinating, John, looking back to 1940 and the creation of Kilquhanity. How does 1990 look?

JA Well, things have obviously changed tremendously. Look at the primary and junior schools, they’ve come so far. Of course, things are changing again, aren’t they, but you’ll never take some of the progress away. Most children can now go to school without fear of being beaten by teachers. You have to remember that. Mind you, if Killie was needed in 1940, it’s as much needed today.

Lib ED What makes you say that?

JA Well, look at 1940. Similar ideas, similar idealism were motivating soldiers and pacifists alike, only the soldiers had been proved so wrong and so recently. At Kilquhanity we were agin the war, but not agin the soldiers. We were agin the government too, and several of us went to jail for refusing to accept the conditions laid down by tribunals for conscientious objectors. An exciting, stimulating time! Our aim was simple; a school that would be international, co-educational and non-violent.

Look around you, we’re not at war, but education and schooling still needs such a model.

Lib ED If you had to capture the “Killie spirit” in a few sentences, how would you do it?

JA Well, Killie is about living together, sharing, loving. We don’t get the grey-faced exam passers, those who can’t enjoy school because of what they have to do to get to University. Killie is about the generation of happiness. That’s really creative work, the work that must be done to enable happiness to grow and flower in a child.

Lib ED In comparison to many other libertarian educational projects you seem to have managed to do something quite unique here by building a local school. There are a huge number of children from the surrounding villages.

JA True. But remember that a lot of people have moved into this area in search of a different lifestyle. Killie just happened to be here.

Lib ED Yes, but you have encouraged

local attendance and involvement, haven’t you?

JA Of course. A lot of the libertarian schools have looked to overseas students to solve their financial problems. I could fill Killie with Japanese children tomorrow and improve our financial situation. I’d rather use the assisted places scheme and encourage local attendance.

Boarding schools are not the solution. Uprooting a child out of their home - I’m not convinced they need it. And talk about uprooting a child from its country. Have you ever been to Japan? I was there just recently. It takes hours and jet lag is a reality you know.

How could I demand six journeys to and from Japan per year of young young people. I don’t know how they handle it at Summerhill.

Lib ED Well, Neill wouldn’t agree with you, would he? What about the “problem parent”, the idea that children need to be away from their parents. That was part of the essence of Neill’s philosophy, was it not.

JA Well it was before he became a parent. I’m not sure afterwards. After all, Zoe was not too happy in Switzerland, was she. Children need loving.

I’m not saying that in independent boarding schools they can’t find love. I just think it’s more difficult. We have boarders here, but they have to be very self-sufficient. The community helps them, but there can be no substitute for a caring, loving home.

Lib ED Getting away from Kilquhanity and free schooling, John, what about education more generally? You’ve always maintained an interest in the politics of education. How do you see things?

JA Well, let’s take Thatcher to start with. Educator, she could never be an educator. Look at her time as Minister of Education. Now we’re reaping the consequences of all her prejudices that she never actually managed to turn into legislation. That’s where all this testing nonsense comes from.

But I’ll tell you something, we have a chance here in Scotland to put something together. There’s tremendous hostility up here you know to any threat from London about streamlining. We don’t want it here and I have the feeling we won’t have it.

Lib ED And the future, John?

JA Well, Kilquhanity will go on. If we can continue for another fifty years, then maybe a few more people will start to take notice. I just hope for more humanity in schooling and child rearing.

“I believe the time is ripe for the launching and expansion of free schools in Japan”

Kilquhanity has an international significance. Within this feature we are lucky enough to be able to publish a piece by Yoshi Nagata about a visit that John and Morag Aitkenhead made to Japan.

IT MAY be a surprise to know that Japan is the country which has the largest number of A.S. Neill’s translated writings. They are still very popular. The more stifling and rigid Japanese education becomes, the more people read Neill’s works.

The A.S. Neill Association in Japan now has nearly 500 members. Books on Neill’s philosophy or on Summerhill, are as popular as ever. Summerhill itself now has over 20 children from Japan, nearly one third of the whole community.

It was a dream of Japanese libertarian educators to invite A.S. Neill there. Unfortunately the visit never came about before Neill’s death in 1973.

But fifteen years later the Association invited John and Morag Aitkenhead of Kilquhanity House School, asking them to give lectures in Japan on education. This invitation was warmly accepted.

Japanese education is notorious for its teacher-controlled cramming, competitive classroom atmosphere, as well as its examination ordeal. The Aitkenheads’ visit seems to have had a strong impact not only on libertarian educators, but also on teachers at state schools and on those parents searching for alternative education.

The 1st of October saw the largest lecture hall at International Christian University, Tokyo, filled to capacity with nearly 300 people. Not only university students, but also many parents and teachers from both conventional and alternative schools, waiting for the Scots guests to turn up.

Though the audience possessed some prior knowledge of what Scots people looked like, they were surprised to see John Aitkenhead in a traditional McNeill kilt with leather sporran.

The International Christian University has over 200 foreign students from about 30 countries. In his speech John Aitkenhead insisted on the importance of internationalism in education.

“The history of the free school movement seems to be the opposite of war history. Summerhill started straight after the First World War

began. Then we set up during the Second with three principles, internationalism, co-education and non-violence. We even took a German refugee as a teacher in those days.”

Prof Shin-ichiro Hori, the organiser of the A.S. Neill Association, is starting a free school based on Neill’s idea. The Japanese Summerhill is called “Kinokuni Kodomonomura” (Kinokuni Children’s Village). It is going to be built in the mountains of Wakayama.

John and Morag spent a whole day there, talking to the prospective members and children. They watched an athletics meeting and loved the free atmosphere of the Children’s Village.

Wherever they visited, John and Morag always encouraged people in the free school movement.

Aitkenhead gave the last lecture in Nagoya. Speaking about the possibilities of the Japanese free school movement there, he said, “For Scottish independence, we say that there is nothing more powerful than the idea whose time has come. The baby, who has its time to come into the world, cannot be stopped. I believe the time is ripe for the launching and expansion of free schools in Japan!”

“Small is beautiful” has been one of John Aitkenhead’s stock phrases for a long time. This is the phrase, to which Aitkenhead appealed, wherever he gave talks. A Japanese Buddha, however, apparently modified this stance. In Nara, one of the ancient cities in Japan, they viewed the famous “Great Buddha”, built in the 8th century, which is 1485 cms in height. Overwhelmed by the greatness of the giant Buddha, he whispered, “B.B... Big is something...”

In lectures Aitkenhead sometimes mentioned his kilt, “Scotland is such a lovely country. And I’m proud to be a Scots. In Scotland people wear a kilt for occasions, for marriages or Highland dancing. I wear kilt all the time. Every kilt means ‘a family’. This is the McNeill family and McNeill means the son of Neill. Well, in a way, in the free school world, I am the son of A.S. Neill. So this kilt is the Neill family.”



"The kids have a power here that's having a say. Nobody need fear anybody else - no adult, no teacher, no other child."

KILLIE STUDENT

THE NEAREST pub to Kilquhanity is small and very local. Visitors are welcomed, but suspected. And if you mention John Aitkenhead's name there is even more cause for suspicion. Who wants to know? Are you journalists?

What lies behind this suspicion is an enormous respect for the man who has been a part of the local community for over fifty years. Locals in the pub identify with John Aitkenhead's passion for Scottish Nationalism. At the same time they respect his pacifism and belief in human virtue. And they admire Kilquhanity. This is an indication of Killie's success, survival and hope for the future.

Kilquhanity is popular in the local community. "Aye, he's wonderful with kids, old Aitkenhead - a marvel." But the difference between John Aitkenhead and the likes of A S Neill, Dora Russell and Bill Curry is that he has this huge identity with his local community. He loves Kirkcudbrightshire. He wants local people to understand his school. He sells his ideas in the shops, the pubs, the local press and on every line of the local grapevine.

The school is not without its problems both at a day to day practical level and also as a model.

Teachers get paid a very low salary, only about £1,000 per year. This inevitably restricts the field of applicants for any jobs and leads to a high turnover of staff. Despite this,

several teachers in the school have been there for periods upwards of ten years. (John and Morag Aitkenhead themselves live a frugal existence.)

Similarly, resources are limited and some children do miss the learning opportunities they know to be available elsewhere - there is virtually no science on offer in the school, for instance.

The school is fee-paying and is, by implication, exclusive, but by clever use of the government's Assisted Places Scheme Killie has a more or less comprehensive intake.

For over fifty years the school has asked some fundamental questions about the nature of freedom. "Freedom, not licence", was one of A S Neill's adages. Kilquhanity has faced many of the issues on the very narrow path between the two.

There is an atmosphere of family and parental concern about John and Morag Aitkenhead of which, one suspects, Neill was not very tolerant. But the belief that children cannot be left to themselves to explore all their desires, insecurities and day to day traumas underpins the whole approach to teaching and learning at Kilquhanity.

Lib ED wishes Killie a very happy fiftieth birthday, and we look forward to another fifty years of "internationalism, co-education and non-violence".



Freedom and structure

Don't miss the next issue...

The Summer '90 issue of *Lib ED* will be published in May. Articles planned include: how to introduce environmental issues into the classroom; an interview with the singer-songwriter Leon Rosselson; and a look at education for black people. Why not subscribe to ensure that you don't miss *LIB ED 14*, or any of the following issues. Fill in the subscription form below, write a cheque and post it to us TODAY!

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Lib ED publishes an annual booklet giving a wealth of information on libertarian education, a comprehensive bibliography, extensive contact addresses and a number of articles explaining the ideas. This guide is included in the price of all types of subscription, but otherwise costs £1.

Our ordinary three issue sub costs £3 (inland), £6 (EEC), or us\$12 (elsewhere).

Overseas subscribers please note: we will accept the equivalent in any overseas banknotes, otherwise please send bank draft in sterling.

Join the Network

The *Lib ED* network is an informal network of people with an interest in libertarian education. By joining you will get even more information on what is going on in Britain and around the world than we can fit into the magazine. Network members receive the following:

National Contact List -- a listing of individuals in the network, so that people can get in touch with each other.

A regular bulletin -- published in March, July and November to keep you in touch between issues of *Lib ED* magazine. This always includes...

An Information Exchange -- news, articles, plans for the next issue of the magazine, a listing of meetings and conference dates, and so on, provided by members of the network.

Access to an Information Service -- *Lib ED* has a huge amount of information on the libertarian education movement. Network members are welcome to write or phone for information.

A Network subscription costs £6 (inland), £9 (EEC) or \$18 (elsewhere).

Spread the word

We don't have a large scale system to distribute *Lib ED* around the world. We rely very much on a small network of SUPPORTERS who take the magazine to conferences, meetings and into bookshops.

So why not join them and become a SUPPORTER. We will send you, as well as your subscription copy, the network bulletins and the D-I-Y guide, an extra 5 copies of each issue which you can pass onto friends and colleagues (you could even sell them!) In this way, we hope that more and more people will be encouraged to subscribe.

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FREE SCHOOL

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Nigel Wright

published in October 1989
by Libertarian Education,
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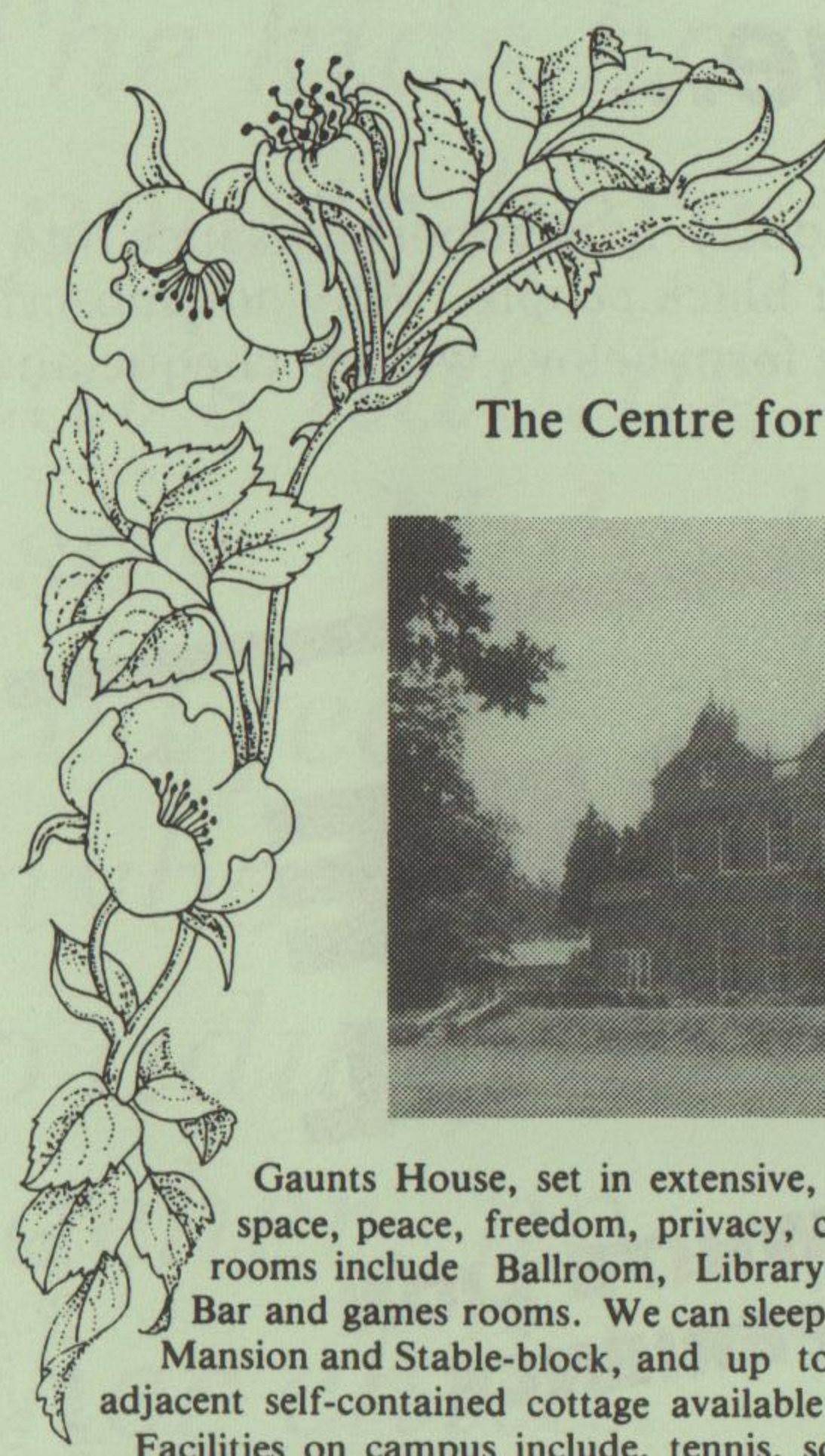
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Nightmare

3.00am The NUT leadership are making their annual plea for the restoration of their negotiating rights. The union general secretary, Doug McAvoy, makes his entrance and sits down at the table across from Boss MacGregor.

"I'm very pleased to see you, Doug," says the Boss. "You don't mind if I call you Doug, do you? Well, anyway, I'm afraid that we can't agree to restore your negotiating rights at this point in time. We feel that the fact that you keep asking for salary increases obviously shows that you aren't yet fit to..."

McAvoy rose slowly to his feet, and then suddenly lunged across the table, grabbing the Boss by the lapels and hauling him bodily over its surface, knocking papers and cups flying.

"Cut the crap," he growled, "I'm here to kick arse. We've put up with you creeps shitting all over us for too long. Well now it's pay back time. The days when the union refused to protect its members' interests are over. From now on we will do everything and anything necessary to guarantee decent salary levels and conditions of service for teachers... and if you Tory bastards get in the way we'll piss all over you"

"You can't talk to the Boss like that," I interjected.

"Any more crap from you, and I'll fix your mouth so it won't hold soup." McAvoy reached over and grabbed me between the legs. "Aaaaaaargh!"

3.05am "Aaaaaaargh!" I sat up in bed, bathed in sweat and shaking uncontrollably. Oh, my God, not that nightmare again. Every night for a week the same terrible dream, so vivid, so real.

What is happening? What is going on? I am filled with dread for the future but thank God it is only a dream. Good old Doug would never behave like that!

11.30am Got to work late after a very disturbed night. Looked at reports on the proposed new selection procedures for teaching staff. I am particularly impressed by the DEFERENTIAL TEACHER SUBLIMINAL RESPONSE TEST, or the LICK OR KICK as we call it.

Prospective teachers are shown a sequence of photographs with snaps of headteachers' arses randomly interspersed. Their involuntary responses are measured on the LICK OR KICK scale. Taken together with the YESSIR, YESSIR, THREE BAGS FULL TEST, this should ensure the appointment of a suitably docile and compliant workforce. All we need now is somebody somewhere to apply to

become a teacher.

There has been some argument with regard to the proposed lobotomisation of deputy heads. There is considerable research to show that they spontaneously lobotomise on appointment, and that surgery will be an unnecessary expense. I must admit that my own experience with deputy heads has tended to bear this out.

The pilot scheme with regard to headteachers has met with some teething problems. The candidates are all assembled together, and then given thirty minutes to hide anywhere they like in the school. Then a serious problem is simulated and a search begins to find them. The last candidate to be found gets the job.

The problem is that on a number of occasions the successful candidate seems to have disappeared altogether, never to be seen again. Still, I don't suppose this will make much difference to the functioning of the school.

2.00pm Visited the John Major PreparaTory School. Throughout the dark years of socialist tyranny under MacMillan, Wilson and Heath, schools like this, unnoticed and unremarked, carried on preparing Tories for the great day when BIG MOTHER took power.

It has always been a source of amazement to me that schools so openly dedicated to counter-revolution and reaction were tolerated. Surely this was the Commies' mistake. Now as I walk along the grey colourless corridors and

look in the grey colourless classrooms, at the rows of identical grey colourless students, I can only give thanks for the efforts of the pioneers.

Incidentally, I wonder who the school was named after.

11.00pm Late night patrol at the old Michael Duane comp, which is supposed to be haunted by the ghost of a progressive teacher. She died of a broken heart back in the late 1980s, and now is supposed to roam the corridors, lamenting the passing of mixed ability teaching, worksheets and after-school activities, prophesying catastrophe and doom.

She is unsettling both teachers and pre-doles, reminding them of an educational past that we are committed to eradicating, to erasing from the record.

A Curriculum Cop exorcism squad has been sent in to eliminate the menace. We must spend the night reading Boss MacGregor's Collected Speeches aloud.

This will consign even the most determined ghost to limbo (and I don't suppose it will do us much good either).

There was a bit of excitement early on when one of the squad thought he had stumbled on a gang of zombies, but it turned out to be a late governors' meeting.

We take it in turns reading. Voices drone on interminably. I start to nod off.

3.00am The NUT leadership are making their annual plea...



The John Major PreparaTory School

Two Essential Handbooks For Teaching World Studies in the 1990s

Making Global Connections A World Studies Workbook

Edited by David Hicks and Miriam Steiner

This handbook for teachers arises out of the work of the World Studies 8-13 national curriculum development project, and is the sequel to the highly successful World Studies 8-13; A Teacher's Handbook.

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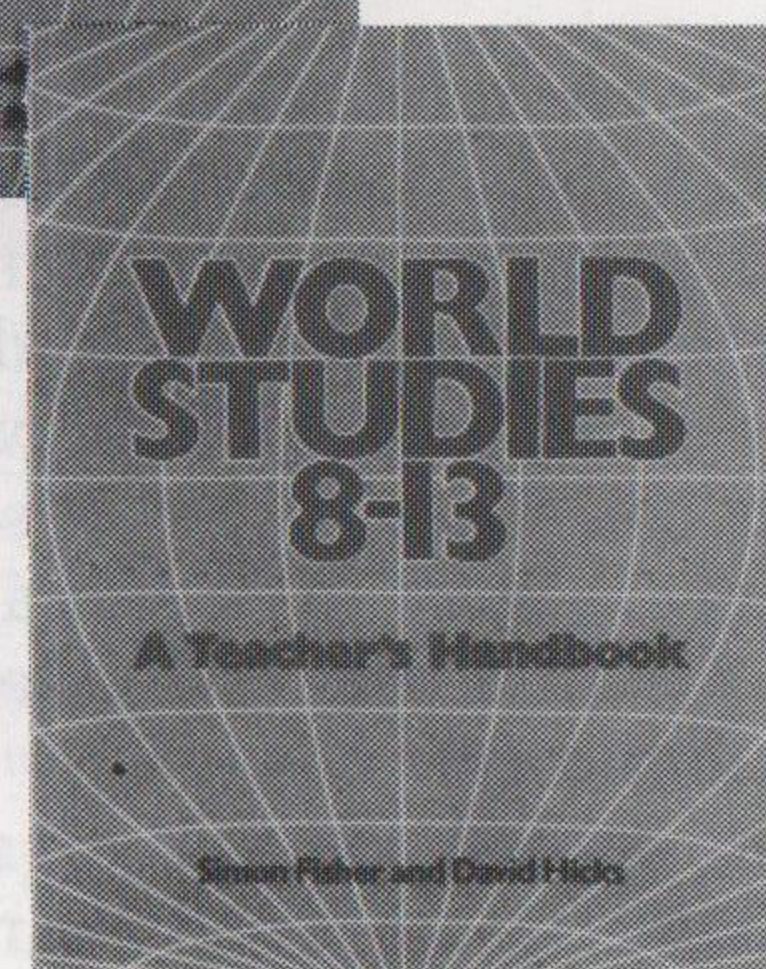
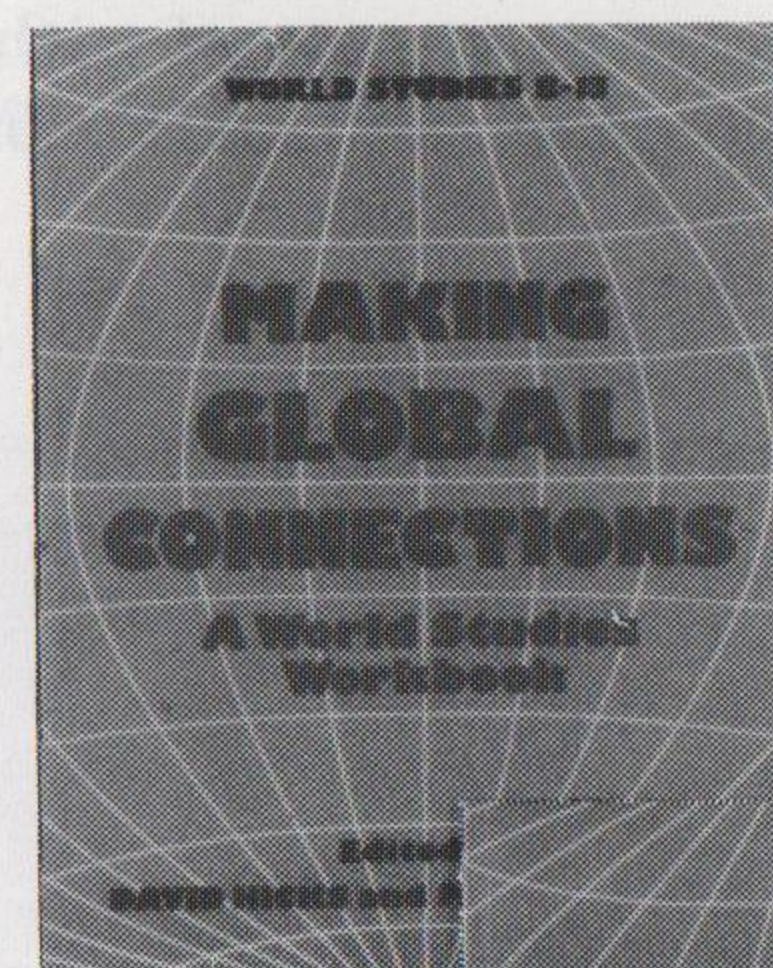
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Cartoon action

Comics: ideology, power and the critics

A book by Martin Barker
Manchester University Press

THERE ARE really two books contained inside this volume: the first a very interesting discussion of a number of different comics and the second a rather obscure discussion of theories of ideology. Let us look at the treatment of comics first.

Barker opens his discussion with an account of IPC's *Action* comic that appeared in the seventies. This was phenomenally successful, building up a regular readership of around 180,000. It became the object of a 'moral panic', was denounced on TV and in the press, and then finally withdrawn after pressure from W.H. Smith.

Why? Ostensibly the comic was objectionable because of its extensive violence, but, as Barker shows, this was not the real reason. *Action* was no more violent than its rivals (*Battle*, *Warlord*, *Valiant*, *Bullet*), but they proved acceptable, safe.

The objection to *Action* was, in fact, a political objection. As Barker makes clear, *Action* "stood at the edge of radicalism", it was openly cynical about authority and invited its readers to join in with this attitude.

Action's readers saw it: "as more than just a comic, telling unusual stories. They saw it also as a social document. In this they connected its goriness with its anti-authority stance. Or better, the bloodthirstiness taken on the meaning of being anti-authority. This is because the stories take on the form of melodramas of social and political cynicism."

It was this that was unacceptable to the guardians of morality. The comic was withdrawn and then reissued with the guts taken out of it. This is a model case study of the policing of the minds of the young.

Barker's account of the affair and his analysis of the offending comic are essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in comics.

He goes on to discuss the 'Scream Inn' comic strip that appeared over a four year period in *Shiver and Shake* and *Whoopee*. Intended for younger readers, this strip, like others of its kind, appealed because of the way it helped negotiate adult power and authority. The argument is most instructive and very convincing. He writes:

"I want to argue that these strips are about children's experience of adult power and authority, and in themselves constitute a form of response to that power... In engaging with these strips,

children are finding ways to think these relations of power. They are learning distinctions between what can be done about authority in fantasy, and what in reality. In other words, they are gaining from these comics some of the mental resources they need to cope with the living reality of the power we adults routinely hold over their lives."

Dennis the Menace, Minnie the Minx, Roger the Dodger and Beryl the Peril will never be the same again.

What we have to accept if we are to understand comics, he argues, is that reading them involves a 'contract' between the reader and the comic. The comic undertakes to talk to its readers in a way that makes the world meaningful to them, in ways that relate to their life experience. To be successful, a comic must touch upon some aspect of its readers' social lives. He argues this with particular reference to *Jackie*, rejecting the usual feminist critiques as too simplistic.

Along with this it has also to be realised that this 'contract' is not achieved spontaneously. Far from it, comics have a 'production history', are deliberate attempts to attach a readership that changes through time. They are subject to all sorts of restraints and constrictions. Comics are, he argues, in the end compromises, and to understand them it is necessary to understand the nature of the compromise, how it was arrived at and how it changes.

Hopefully he has placed discussion on a new footing with these conclusions. Without any doubt, this book is the most important discussion of comics to have so far appeared. Barker takes comics seriously, treats both them and their readership with respect and also clearly enjoys them himself. The end result is an informative and stimulating book as far as comics are concerned.

Less successful is his discussion of theories of ideology. His criticisms of other people's approaches seem acceptable, but any alternative account needs to be more firmly rooted in practice than anything he attempts. One can only hope that this is not his last word on the subject.



Links

Making Global Connections: A World Studies Notebook
edited by D. Hicks and M. Steiner
Oliver and Boyd, pp179, £10.00

SIMILAR in style to *World Studies 8-13: A teacher's handbook*, published three years ago, *Making Global Connections* attempts to enable teachers to present political issues to children.

From chapters on "Wasted wealth" and "Food comes first", the emphasis is on teaching through raising questions and through supporting informed choices made by children.

Whether used as resource books for a liberal/libertarian school, or as humane recipes for lessons in a more authoritarian situation both books have much to recommend them.

Fourpods

When the Tripods Came
A novel by John Christopher
Viking Kestrel, £6.95

JOHN Christopher's Tripods trilogy, probably the most important work of juvenile science fiction so far published in this country, was given a great boost by the outstanding BBC serialisation of the first two volumes. It was probably inevitable, therefore, that he should produce a 'prequel', an account of the Tripod's takeover of Earth.

Without giving too much away, they use the same methods that Rupert Murdoch is currently trying (brainwashing from outer space), but to considerably better effect.

Unfortunately, the novel is only a pale reflection of the original trilogy. It is enjoyable, but not much more.

Just background

Panda and the Odd Lion
Panda's Puzzle
Two books by Michael Foreman
Hamish Hamilton, £6.95 each

BOTH of these books are beautifully illustrated, deserving commendation for that alone.

In the first, the odd lion comes to recognise that his wings make him special rather than odd. The last word is given to Panda; "If you can't join them, beat them!" In the second, Panda travels the world in search of understanding; am I white and black or black and white, he wonders? "It's all a matter of background", the chameleon tells him; "The important thing is to work to live... don't live to work", opines the water buffalo; "There must be more to life than how high up you are", concludes Panda.

They are a delight and well worth placing before young readers.

Struggle, love and revolution

Breaking Free: The Adventures of Tin Tin

A comic book
Attack International, pp170, £2

TIN TIN first made his appearance in 1929 in the paper of the Belgian Federation of Catholic Scouts. In his early years he took on the Communists and stropky blacks in the Congo before settling down as a harmless young hero with all the controversy drained away. That is until now.

Attack International introduce us to a completely new Tin Tin. In this excellent graphic novel we meet a Tin Tin who has just been thrown off a YTS scheme for sticking one on the boss, has had his dole money cut and has been caught shoplifting.

This is Tin Tin with a difference. He

gets a job on a building site, working alongside Captain Haddock, and quickly becomes involved in a militant wildcat strike. This becomes part of a strike wave sweeping the whole country, overwhelming both union officials and bosses alike.

This Tin Tin swears like a trooper, smokes, wrecks a yuppie wine bar, intimidates scabs, fights with the police and throws petrol bombs. He has to educated with regard to gay and lesbian rights but soon sees the light. The situation builds up into a pre-revolutionary phase. Everything is possible!

As well as being very entertaining, this is a useful guide to rank and file organising, it's highly recommended. But whatever happened to Snowy? What about animal liberation?



Visions of a wholesome society

Including pupils with disabilities - Curricula for all

A book edited by Tony Booth and Will Swann
Open University Press, pp320, £9.95

BOOTH and Swann have made their reputations by consistently arguing that pupils with disabilities should not be segregated into special schools and that there should be more control in the hands of the consumers of the education.

One chapter of this book describes the way a group of pupils with "difficulties" in a unit of a Birmingham Comprehensive managed to negotiate changes in the way the school labelled and treated them. Interestingly, one of the demands was that the school should enforce uniforms and sanctions on them just as rigorously as on anyone else. David Cropp, the head of the unit, feels

that the ability to wield power over their own lives enhanced their view of themselves as whole people within the school system.

June Statham describes the setting up of self-advocacy groups by people who have been labelled mentally handicapped. These can collectively challenge the routine oppression met from professionals and public alike, as Statham says, "in a way that many 'ordinary' people would envy."

The book is well worth reading for the final chapter alone. This contains an analysis of four interviews with classmates of a girl with severe and multiple difficulties in a mainstream primary school. Suddenly a vision of a more wholesome society is opened up - one where the stereotypes of 'normality' that are forced down our throats will no longer apply.

Looking after the kids

Daycare for kids: A parents' survival guide

edited by Marion Kozak
Daycare Trust, pp128

Babies in daycare
edited by Veronica Williams
Daycare Trust, pp88, £4.95

THE FIRST book is sponsored by the Midland Bank, and the second by the Baring Foundation, but there is no visible sign of kowtowing to authority in either of these short books.

Daycare for kids is mainly about how to make the maximum use of what is on offer. The book covers key issues of locating good quality child care, health, equality of opportunity, integration of children with disabilities, babies in daycare, play and education, care for the over fives outside school and self help in setting up daycare.

But, as the final chapter points out, "In England provision for under-fives is sparse, unco-ordinated and of variable quality." This compares badly with France where there is open access child care for children from age three.

Babies in daycare is more wide ranging, and perhaps the more hard hitting. It would probably be more appealing to those with an interest in the mechanics, theory and development of daycare provision, yet it is built on practical examples.

The first chapter, by Eleanor Goldschmied, is a short but useful introduction to a child's learning in the first year of life. It makes cogent points about a child's need for real objects to play with rather than plastic.

Peter Moss contributes the last chapter which is on employment, parenthood and gender. He makes the point that:

"Childcare, especially of very young children, is devalued work. The pay and conditions bear no relation to the importance, complexity and demands of the work. Like many jobs, it is regarded as unskilled because it is feminised."

Daycare provision, which the Tories assert is a private matter, is being eroded today due to the present government's policies towards local authorities.

But how much have Thatcher and her lot ever looked after kids? Britain's first woman Prime Minister has put the rights of women back many years.

Breaths of Air

A Breath of Fresh Air

A novel by Geraldine Kaye

Slaves and Captains

A novel by Rhodri Jones
both published by Adlib at £3.50

A BREATH OF Fresh Air is the story of Amy, a young black girl living in Bristol, and of her search for an identity. Amy has a white mother who refuses to discuss her father with her. She is left without roots, without knowing who she really is.

Her personal predicament is nicely juxtaposed with her school class project which is concerned with the part the slave trade played in Bristol's history.

The two concerns are cleverly intertwined. Amy's desire to know about her black father parallels her uncovering of the fact that the city's stones "are slippery with the blood of slaves."

Amy finds life more and more difficult to cope with and eventually runs away from home. Once out on the streets, she finds herself back in Bristol in 1790, a slave girl bound for the sugar plantations in Jamaica.

The main body of the book describes her experiences on board the slave ship *Kittiwake*, her life on the plantation working both as a field and a house slave and her unsuccessful attempt to escape into the hills to join the maroons.

This is a tremendous piece of writing, absolutely uncompromising but still sensitive and compassionate.

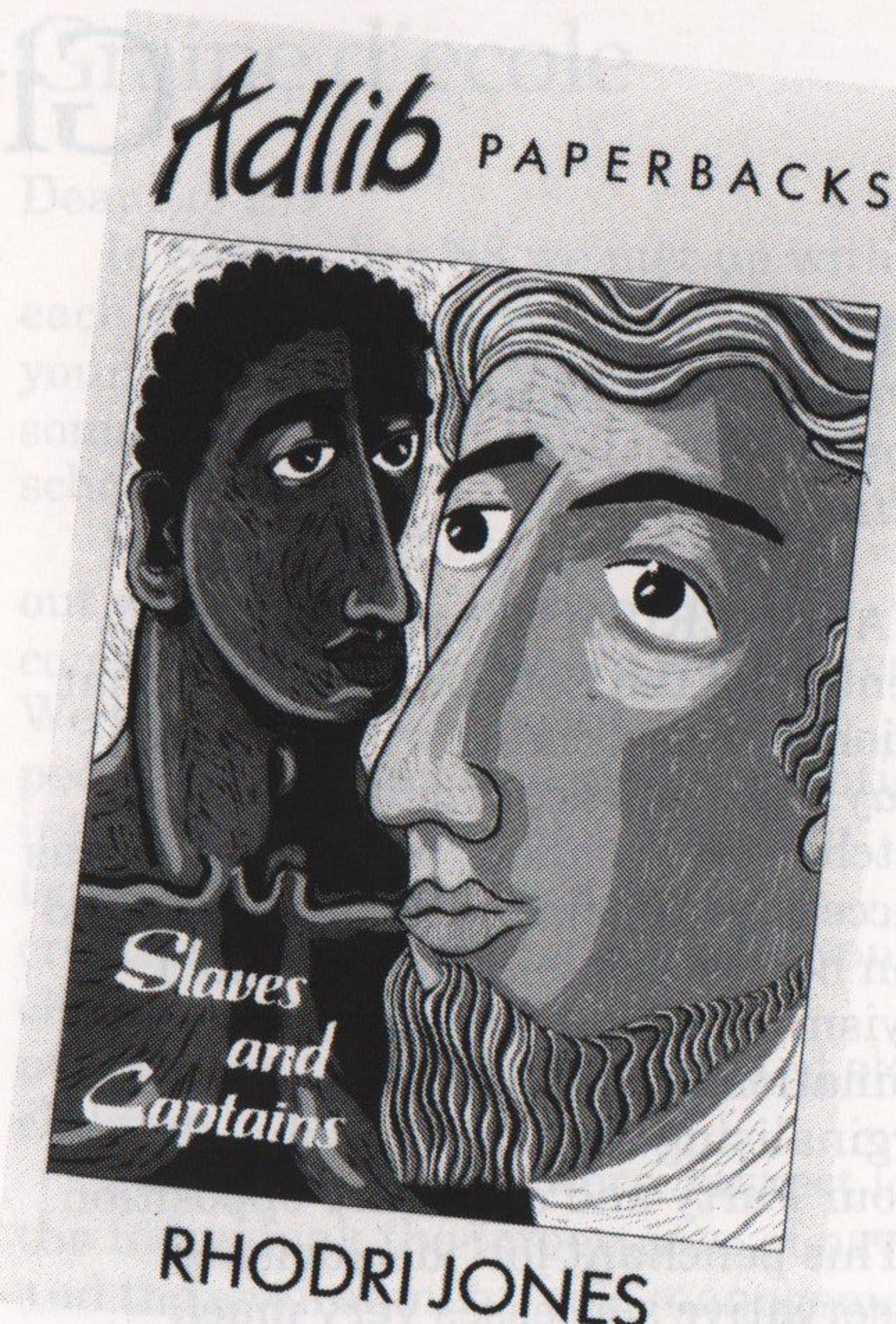
Kaye's indictment of slavery and the slave trade is all the more powerful because it is made through the experiences of someone that young readers will readily identify with. The slave trade's grim statistics are often too great for people to comprehend. She shows how it affected the life of one sympathetic character. The horror is all the more real for being personalised.

When Amy returns to her existence in Bristol, she now knows who she is. She insists on being told about her father and can face life strengthened and with pride.

This is a superb book. Every school library should have copies.

Also of interest is Rhodri Jones' *Slaves and Captains*. This is a rewrite of Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*. Captain Amasa Delano comes across a slave ship in difficulties and goes to its aid.

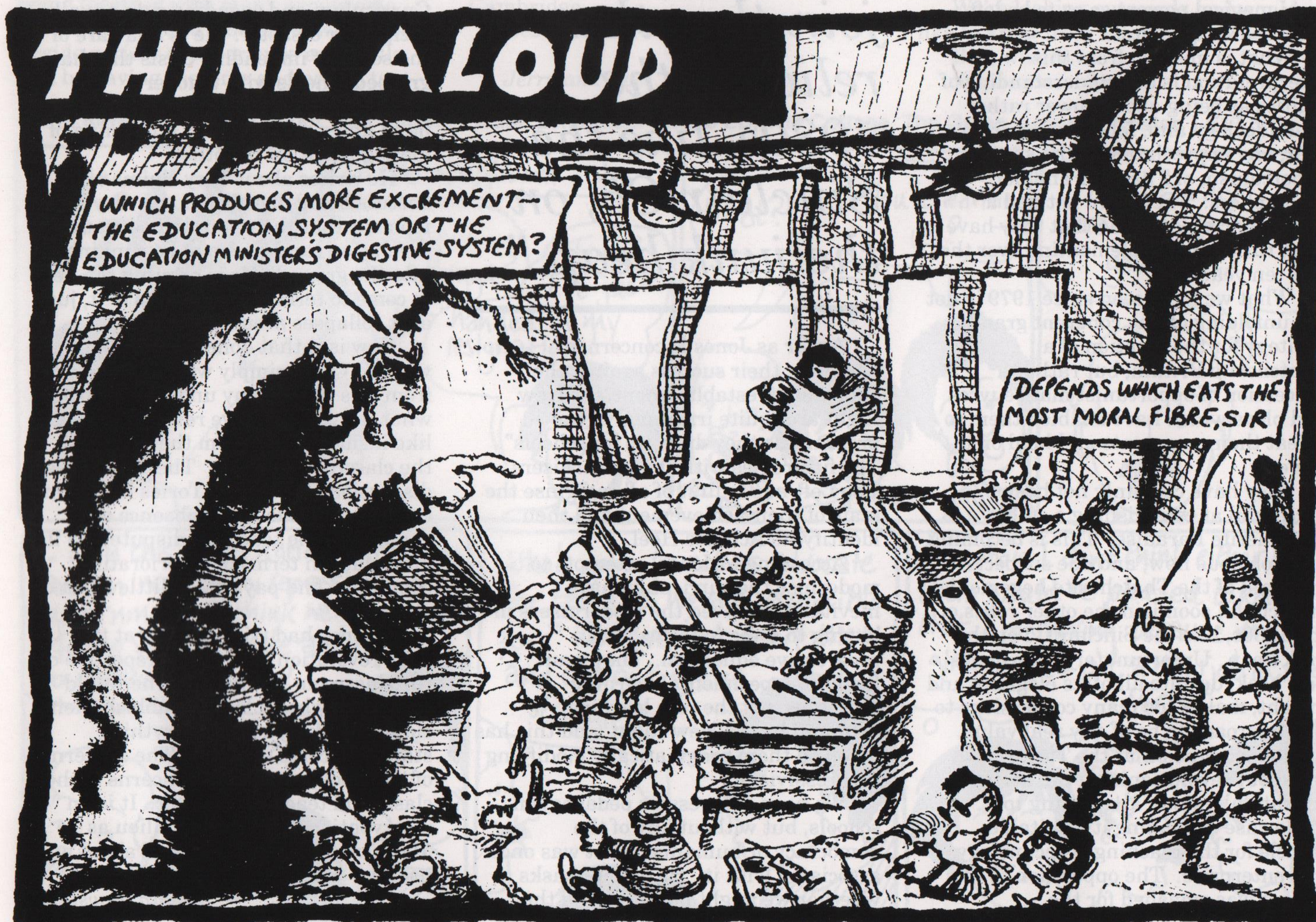
He finds a disturbing situation on board but cannot quite put his finger on what it is that is wrong. The ship has lost many of its crew and has only been



saved with the help of slaves, but something is not right.

Even though he is a liberal humane man, Delano's racism prevents him from solving the mystery of the *San Dominick*. He just cannot conceive of slaves being capable of acting independently of their masters.

A disturbing mystery story with a powerful message, this is highly recommended.



Give way to the right

Right Turn: The Conservative Revolution in Education

A book by Ken Jones
Radius, £7.95

"THATCHERISM" is very much an invention of the Left, or at least of that section of it associated with *Marxism Today*. The political victories of the Thatcher Government were theorised as a successful hegemonic project that had given her particular brand of rabid Toryism a supposed ideological domination over the British people, marginalising the trade unions, the Labour Party and any other opposition.

This penchant for 'ideologising' Conservative successes very much reflected the concerns of *Marxism Today*'s academic and media contributors and professional middle class readership. It contributed nothing to understanding the changing relation of forces in the class war and even less to attempts to turn the tide.

The advocates of this particular interpretation of Conservative rule can most charitably be seen as so many rabbits mesmerised by a snake, fascinated by it, unable to take their eyes off it, endowing it with semi-magical powers so as to be left defenceless against it.

What is missing from this interpretation is any understanding of politics as being about power rather than ideology and, following on from that, any appreciation of the sheer opportunism of Thatcher and her accomplices. They have not had a hegemonic programme that they have been ruthlessly implementing over the last ten years.

What we have seen since 1979 is not the unfolding of any coherent grand strategy for the creation of a Thatcherite Britain, but rather a succession of opportunist manoeuvres and ploys which have enabled them to defeat their opponents and hold on to power.

They have certainly not been successful at establishing a stable Thatcherite Paradise. This is becoming all too obvious now, and one suspects that talk of the Thatcherite hegemonic project will soon join the other relics of the 1980s, like the Sinclair C5 on the junk heap. Unfortunately, Ken Jones' new book, despite all of its elegance and insight, makes too many concessions to this approach to be of any real value.

Jones argues that the Tories have set about revolutionising the British education system, attempting to modernise it, making it a suitable vehicle for the teaching of technology and enterprise. The opposition to this project was smashed for the

modernisers by the ideologues of the New Right, by the likes of Roger Scruton and Ray Honeyford, whose cultural offensive disarmed the educational establishment.

Jones provides extended critiques of the ideas of these two men that are well worth reading, although he grossly exaggerates their importance. The New Right, however, were not the beneficiaries of their victory. Whereas they looked to the workings of the market to regulate the education system, the modernisers have instead proceeded to dramatically strengthen central state control so as to carry through a curriculum revolution that is opposed to much the New Right stands for.

"... the Thatcherite hegemonic project will soon join the other relics of the 1980s, like the Sinclair C5, on the junk heap."

As far as Jones is concerned whatever their success against the educational establishment, the New Right are "quite irrational in the programme they draw up for schools". The future lies with the modernisers. The Left has to first of all recognise the scale of their achievement and then identify its Achilles Heel.

According to Jones, attempts to modernise the curriculum have inevitably involved the modernisers in having to come to terms with progressive education. They want flexible, experimental learning processes, not the rote learning favoured by the New Right, and this has involved them pragmatically modifying progressivism.

We have progressive pedagogy in schools, but without any of the democracy or humanism that was once associated with it. He actually asks whether we might not be seeing the

Thatcher Government presiding "over an extensive process of curriculum change that can with justice - though some puzzlement - be labelled progressive".

This leads him to an amazingly sympathetic account of the TVEI initiative (this sort of enthusiasm is usually reserved for people for whom it has meant promotion). He actually argues that we have to face up to the fact that the Tories have had some success in raising standards and that they will have more once the National Curriculum is in place!

This is so much nonsense, and dangerous nonsense at that. Any improvement in 'standards' is due to the introduction of GCSE, one of the last gasps of the old educational consensus that the Tories have so effectively destroyed. Moreover, the GCSE, along with records of achievement and other 'progressive' panaceas seem almost certainly doomed as the National Curriculum is welded into place.

More to the point, Jones seems completely oblivious to the fact that the Tories are mounting an attack on the State education system. Local Management of Schools, The National Curriculum and spending cuts are all recipes for disaster. He is unaware of the sense of impending crisis that has gripped schools with teacher demoralisation and shortage on the one hand and a chronic over-burdening of management on the other.

He writes about Tory claims of success being justified at the very moment that their vaunted educational revolution can be seen to be running into the ground. He is arguing the need to come to terms with aspects of it, just as it collapses around him.

How is it that Jones has got it so wrong? Quite simply what is missing from this book is any understanding of what the conservative revolution looks like inside schools from the viewpoint of the classroom teacher. There is no real discussion of what the Tories have done to teachers, indeed the absence of a chapter on the teachers' dispute and its aftermath in terms of deteriorating conditions and pay cuts is little short of shameful.

If Jones had tried looking at the Tory revolution from the perspective of the classroom teacher then he would have seen what a load of rubbish their claims are long before everything started to come unstuck. The concerns of this book are not the concerns of the classroom teacher, however. It is an intervention in the same milieu as *Marxism Today* inhabits and about as useful.

John Newsinger.

Desert Tech

Dear Lib ED

Sunseed Trust is a charity which formed quite recently and has come at a time when ecology is in the headlines and all political parties are claiming to be "green". We spent 4 weeks at the Sunseed Desert Technology research project at Los Molinos in Southern Spain, and got a tremendous amount out of the experience.

So often I have felt inadequate in the face of compounding world crises and alienated from any solutions - I pay my money through covenants, subscriptions and glossy brochures of merchandise whilst the real experts are doing the work. So here we were the ones with blisters and back-ache and it felt good!

About three years ago the Trust took on a few houses and some land in an abandoned village in one of the hottest and driest areas of Europe. Its aims were to develop and test new methods and appropriate technology for desert recovery and for saving good land from destruction.

Alongside this the project is an experiment in simple community living. Staff and working volunteers both share in a 'low-impact' lifestyle. Sunseed is not exactly an educational project, but a lot of learning takes place. This is simply by being involved directly, by being together with many people who are interested and who bring with them a wide variety of experience and skills, and by having the time and access to

resource materials that the project collects, uses or has even been developed itself.

As for criticism, the project is still very young with just a few strands of research work already started - viability trials for tree species, ecological effects of tree planting, solar stills for purifying water, ways of recycling waste and irrigated organic gardening.

Part of the reason for siting the project in Europe was the ease of access for working volunteers who make a large input to the place physically, financially and in experience and ideas. With such a throughput of people it is not really possible to have a highly participative community. We were not there for long enough, but I expect continuity of effort can also be patchy as a result of this as well. Still, it works quite well even so.

I felt that they charged a bit too much (especially as you must fund your own way there first). Working volunteers do 24 hours work per week and at the moment are asked to pay £30. This is one of the main sources of income to keep the project running and meet staffing costs.

The surroundings of the project are really beautiful and if only for that, the excellent wholefood, uncluttered time and good company, it's well worth going. For more information contact Sunseed Desert Technology, PO Box 2000, Cambridge.

Best wishes,

Jerry and Sue

Graine d'école

Dear Lib ED

In September '88 we met up with each other, a group of parents with young kids to whom we wished to offer something different from traditional schooling.

For ten months we struggled to work out what were the ideas we had in common, and those where we differed. We then put out a questionnaire to people in the area who were "potentially interested". We had identified two types of need. Some related to the creation of a welcoming place for young children, but with a non-school perspective. However, we wanted older children to join in.

The agreed issues were: respect for the individual, the importance of nature and the environment, self-management and autonomy, participation by parents.

We found some land, about 7000 square metres in a suburb of Bordeaux, and we worked on it. We have a house, a cooker and some animals. Every day we welcome a small group of kids (3 to 6 year olds) and usually older children and grown-ups who get activities going.

The "Graine d'Ecole" is growing with the children according to their needs and those of the adults who join in. We have decided to work totally outside the system as regards finance - we share.

We're looking outwards and would like to know from any similar projects.

Best wishes

Stephanie Lafitte

We're always delighted to get your letters. Please send them to: Lib ED, The Cottage, The Green, Leire, Leicester, LE17 5HL.

